

Big John – Prologue

The central figures are a pair of couples who only have money because they have been frugal. The weekend before TSHTF, the central couple gets married in Las Vegas with the other couple standing up for them. The central figure in the story hits a slot for some big money, but he converts it to gold and silver coins and the money becomes mostly irrelevant to the story.

The other couple is more into survival than the central couple but in the days before TSHTF, the namesake of the story is struggling to catch up. What really saves the day for them is the fact that other couple is into survival and have a cabin in the mountains that they all bugout to.

The central figure is the security chief for a construction company and his new wife works for a retailer. The husband of the other couple is a paramedic and his wife a legal secretary.

Both men have been avid gun collectors and the paramedic works for a Sheriff's Department and has an extensive collection of LEO only firearms while 'Big John' has a lot of sporting arms with a twist, he loves the M1A rifle and has several. Many of his firearms and accessories would land him in jail if he got caught with them.

The couples are just average people with no family and no children to complicate their situation. And, they have some challenges in the days after TSHTF, which were mostly a series of terrorist attacks using dirty bombs.

Big John – Chapter 1 – In the Beginning

He'd gotten his first rifle when he was about 12, a Winchester model 62 pump, just before they were discontinued. When he was 16, he'd gotten his first shotgun, one of those Remington model 870's in 12-gauge. And when he turned 21 and could buy a handgun, his first had been a Ruger Mark II. Then, he enlisted to avoid the draft towards the end of Vietnam and luckily never made it overseas. When his 4-year hitch ended, he had a lot of guns; some bought from other soldiers and some from gun stores. They were all used but in excellent condition. Out of the service and single, he had money to burn and rather than spend it on booze and broads, he bought guns. Springfield Armory had brought out the civilian version of the M14 rifle in 1974 and periodically they made improvements to the product line or added new products. He had every model of rifle they brought out.

And the longer he collected, the harder it became. First, really before he'd gotten into gun collecting in a big way, had come the Gun Control Act of 1968 eliminating buying guns by mail, among other things. Then, in 1986, the Congress went crazy, enacting 3 laws: PL99-308, the Firearms Owners Protection Act that mainly amended the GCA of '68; PL99-408, the Law Enforcement Officers Protection Act outlawing 'Cop Killer Bullets'; and PL99-570, the Armed Career Criminal Act that was mainly a drug enforcement law but increased penalties for illegal possession of a firearm.

The Crime Control Act of 1990 bans manufacturing and importing semiautomatic assault weapons in the US and established "Gun-free school zones". 1994 was busy with the Brady handgun Violence Prevention Act and the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, the so called Assault Weapons ban. In 1998, the National Instant Criminal Background Check finally got up and running and in September of 2004, provisions of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 ended.

He watched the 2nd Amendment to the Constitution shrink nearly to oblivion. All the while the prices of firearms kept going up and up and up. For example, you could still buy a Ruger Vaquero in .45 Colt, but these days they ran about \$1,380. The US Government had paid a little over \$100 for an M14 but the M1A went for about \$1,586 with a walnut stock. And by the time the High Capacity Magazine ban went away, it was very hard to find any of the USGI 20 magazines for the M1A rifles. All of these things made him a little angry.

He stood six foot six and weighed two forty five, kind of broad at the shoulder and narrow at the hip. And everybody knew you didn't give any lip to Big John. The last fella that had teased him with the lyrics from that Jimmy Dean song had eaten his teeth. They called him Jack and he'd never been anywhere near a coalmine; but, he was partial to pork sausage patties. And being a bachelor, he ate breakfast twice a day and off the catering truck at noon. Jack met a fella at the shooting range and they got to visiting and ended up going to coffee and later became friends. The other man, Steve, was a gun collector and was also into survival. Jack didn't know a whole lot about survival;

they hadn't taught him much in the service; he had a flashlight and a transistor radio and his guns, nothing else.

"You're a collector Jack?" Steve asked.

"Steve, I've been accumulating firearms since I got my first rifle when I was 12 years old," Jack acknowledged.

"What do you have?" Steve asked.

"Let's see if I can remember them all," Jack said. "Maybe if I do it by caliber, I can. In .22 caliber, I have the Winchester model 62 and a model 9422; plus I have a Ruger Mark II and a second Mark II that's been modified and a 10/22. I've got a Ruger Bearcat and a Single six convertible. Then there's my H&R model 900 snap out cylinder revolver with the 6" barrel, man, that's a honey."

"Now if we move up a half notch to the .22WMR, I have the other cylinder for the single six and the 9422," Jack continued. "A half notch more gets us to the 5.56x45mm and I have a pair of Mini-14's plus two of the AR-15's. I just buy mostly current model firearms and keep them."

"I have a lot of the same weapons," Steve pointed out.

"In 30-06, I have a Winchester model 70 and a Garand rifle," Jack continued. "I also have a model 94 .30-30. In 7.62x51mm, I have all standard barrel length of the M1A through the White Feather. I see they just brought out a SOCOM-16 rifle, but I don't like the looks of it. Which reminds me, I have an AR-7 in .22 and a M6 Scout in .22/.410, I knew I was forgetting something. Moving up the calibers, I have a .32 auto and an S&W Chief's special in .38. I also have a Ruger Blackhawk Convertible and two Colt Pythons with 2½" and 4" barrels, all .357 magnums. I have the Winchester model 94 in .375 Winchester and a Ruger Super Blackhawk in .44 magnum and a M1911 in .45 auto. What else? Oh a Marlin 1894 and a 1894C"

"You must have a pretty big gun cabinet," Steve observed.

"I have 3," Jack said, "One for handguns and 2 for long arms. Anyway, to finish out my collection, I have the 870 I got when I was 16 plus a Remington 20" barrel with rifle sights that I had bored out to 3". Then I picked up a couple of the 870's with the 18" barrels and a couple of years ago I got 870 combos in 20-gauge and 12-gauge. Add to that a Mossberg 590A1. Plus I have my favorite handguns, the Ruger Vaqueros in .45 Colt."

"Those are expensive and hard to come by," Steve said.

"Not like the Colts," Jack acknowledged. "I have 6 single action revolvers, 2 each with 4⅝" barrels, 5½" barrels and 7½" barrels. One of each size is nickel-plated and the others are the case hardened frame with blued barrels."

“Man, I’d like to see those someday,” Steve responded.

“So what do you have for firearms?” Jack asked.

“I mostly went a different way, Jack,” Steve replied. “The only .22’s I have are a couple Ruger 10/22’s and Mark II’s. I have a substantial collection of M16 and M14 rifles. Plus I have a pair Remington 870 combo the same as you and several of the M1911’s. I didn’t want to be burdened with 2 or 3-dozen different calibers, so I homed in on my 5 favorites. I had Special Forces training in the service and am familiar with lots of foreign arms, however. I would think that a person with a large gun collection like yours would be into survival preparations, but you say you’re not?”

“No, not really,” Jack admitted. “About all the extra food I have are a couple of boxes of Minute Rice and a case of pork and beans.”

“What do you think of the war in Iraq?” Steve asked.

“I try not to think about it, Steve,” Jack replied. “I think it’s a stupid way to fight a war, that’s what I think. It is going to turn into another Vietnam.”

“I heard that they going to start pulling out of Afghanistan and are talking about troop reductions in Iraq after the elections,” Steve said.

“I saw that on the news,” Jack said, “But I won’t believe it until it happens. What Bush ought to do is get rid of Rumsfeld. He’s all in favor of technology instead of putting a large number of forces on the ground.”

“So, do you live in an apartment or do you own a home?” Steve asked.

“Neither, Steve,” Jack said. “I got a 24’ travel trailer that I have parked at a 1,000 Trails Campground. I move it between 2 or 3 different campgrounds every couple of weeks.”

“So you don’t have a permanent address?” Steve asked.

“I have a post office box close to work,” Jack answered. “That’s my permanent address but my location varies from time to time. It’s one of those private post offices that let you designate a suite or apartment number so I have an apartment number.”

“Does this travel trailer of yours have propane and a generator?” Steve asked.

“Yes, why?” Jack was curious.

“I’d say that you’re better prepared than you think, Jack,” Steve replied. “What do you drive?”

"I've got an old diesel pickup these days with a rebuilt motor and manual transmission," Jack answered. "It has Warn hubs on the front and I added an aftermarket long-range fuel tank."

"You're far better prepared than you think, Jack," Steve smiled. "About all you need is some extra supplies in one of those storage lockers and you'd be good to go in case of any emergency. Sandy and I have a home that I've converted the basement into sort of a survival shelter," Steve explained. "We bought a lot of food packed in nitrogen and put in a standby generator and fuel tank. There's enough food for the 2 of us for about a year, maybe a little longer with the regular food she has in the pantry. I have a Ham band HF/VHF/UHF radio and some antennas on my roof."

"You own your own home?" Jack asked.

"We own 25% and the bank owns the other 75%," Steve chuckled. "We do have a cabin up in the woods as a bug-out place. It has its own well, septic system and solar panels to provide electricity. I inherited the place from my folks."

"You lost your folks?" Jack asked.

"Usual story, Jack, some drunk driver with a half dozen convictions under his belt," Steve reflected. "What about your family?"

"Only child," Jack replied. "My dad took off when I was a kid and we never saw him again. My mother remarried a guy and they moved to Florida while I was in the service and basically disappeared. You and the wife have any kids?"

"Nope. Sandy can't have children," Steve answered. "She and I were only children, too. Her parents came to the US after the Second World War and she came late in life for them. A few years back, they returned to Germany. Why don't I check with Sandy and maybe we could burn a steak on the grill this weekend?"

"I wouldn't want to impose," Jack said.

"No imposition, Jack," Steve grinned, "I'd just have to pull 3 steaks out of one of our freezers."

"Well, here's my cell phone number," Jack said. "Let me know either way. If I do come, what can I bring?"

"Dessert would probably be easiest for you, wouldn't it?" Steve asked.

"I suppose. Any preferences?" Jack asked.

“Delicious and decedent,” Steve suggested. “Let me give you my number and address, I’m sure it will be okay with Sandy. If you have a friend, bring her too, but let me know so I can take out another steak.”

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“What took you so long?” Sandy asked.

“I met a guy at the range and we went for coffee,” Steve explained. “Sorry, honey.”

“I should have known it would have been another gun nut,” she laughed.

“I suggested that maybe we could have him over on Saturday for a cookout,” Steve commented. “We left it up in the air subject to your approval.”

“It’s fine with me,” she replied. “Tell me about your new friend.”

“The man is big,” Steve said. “I’m 6’2 and 185 and he towers over me by about 4”,” Steve replied. “His name is Jack Douglas and he works for a construction company. He’s been into collecting guns since he was about 12 years old and has as many or more than we have. I told him he could bring a friend.”

“He’s single?” Sandy asked.

“From what I gathered, yes,” Steve acknowledged. “He didn’t say anything about a wife or kids. He lives in a 24’ travel trailer that he moves from spot to spot. We talked about survival a little and he thinks he isn’t prepared. But, if he had a storage locker with extra supplies of food and fuel, I think he’d be about as prepared as we are. As it is, he has an old diesel pickup with extra fuel tanks and 4 wheel drive.”

“I ordered the extra stuff you wanted today,” Sandy announced. “They said it would be here in about a week. I ordered one deluxe 1-year food storage unit like we discussed. When it comes, we can haul it to the cabin.”

“I picked up two Eagles today and a roll of pre-65 dimes,” Steve said.

“How many does that make for us?” she asked.

“Twelve Eagles apiece and one roll each of dimes, quarters and half-dollars,” Steve said. “Say, as big as that Jack is, maybe I could get him to help me move the second freezer up to the cabin. He could probably pick the thing up by himself.”

“He’s not fat then?” Sandy asked.

“Sandy the guy has about the same proportional build that I do, only bigger,” Steve said. “He said he jogs in the evening 4 times a week to keep in shape and lifts weights the other 3 nights.”

“When does he find time to shoot?” Sandy asked.

“During the days on weekends and on evenings when it rains,” Steve said.

“What does he do for a living?” Sandy asked.

“All I know is that he works for a construction company like I told you,” Steve said. “He didn’t really say exactly what kind of work he did.”

“Did you get his number?” Sandy asked.

“Yes,” Steve replied.

“Give him a call and tell him around 3pm on Saturday and he’s more than welcome to bring a friend.”

“I told him he could bring dessert, honey. Something delicious and delectable,” Steve smiled.

“As long as it’s chocolate and makes your teeth hurt, it will be perfect,” she said.

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Jack had been dating a gal named Moira for about 3 years. When he got Steve’s call he called Moira and asked her to come to the cookout. After his conversation with Steve in the coffee shop, he’d gotten to thinking about some of the things Steve had said. He’d picked up two Coleman fluorescent U-Tube lanterns with nightlight, several spare packs of D-cells and 2 spare bulbs. He’d thought about renting a small storage locker that could hold about what he could cram into the trailer and the back of the pickup. Steve had mentioned that Sandy hoped he’d bring something chocolate and he asked Moira to pick out something and he’d pay for it.

Sandy was 5’9” and had shoulder length brunette hair. Her figure was average-to-average plus. Moira was 6’ tall and also a brunette. She too, had an average-to-average plus figure and was 30-something. And, there could be no doubt how both of the women spent what spare time they had... working out. Sandy worked in a law office as a receptionist and Moira worked for a retail store. Steve was a paramedic who worked for the Sheriff’s Department. The gals had eyed each other for a moment but quickly became fast friends. Steve took Jack down to his basement and showed him his gun collection.

Steve had one advantage working for the Sheriff’s Department. He was a sworn Law Enforcement Officer and that made everything he owned legal. Maybe Steve should

have been on the SWAT Team instead of a paramedic. He had 4 M16A3's and a large supply of 30-round magazines. These were supplemented by 4 M14 rifles with the lock so they could only fire semi-auto. Plus he had 4 Kimber TLE II pistols used by the LA SWAT Team. Everything he had was in sets of 4 except for the shotguns and .22 rifles and pistols of which he only had 2. One of the shotguns was a 12-gauge and the other a 20-gauge. They had 2 deluxe 1-year food supplies in the basement and he told Jack he had 2 more at the cabin and one on the way. All of the military rifles were fitted with suppressors, FA762S on the M14's and M4-FA on the M16's. Steve also had suppressors for the 2 Mark II's that slipped over the front sight and turned a ¼ turn to lock in place.

"Jack, I've been planning on moving this freezer up to the cabin," Steve said. "I'd hate to impose on a new friendship but could you help me do that next weekend?"

"Sure, Steve," Jack replied. "I've thought about renting a small storage unit and in exchange, you can help me figure out what to stock it with."

"Fair exchange," Steve said. "But that's easy Jack, all you have to do is call Walton Feed up in Idaho and order a deluxe 1-year supply for one person."

"What does that run?" Jack asked.

"Just under \$1,000," Steve replied. "As for other things you could use, I'd suggest that you get several 25-gallon bottles of propane for your stove and generator. You might want to get a pump or two that you could use to pump diesel fuel and water."

"I picked up 2 of those Coleman fluorescent U-Tube lanterns this week," Jack mentioned.

"Do you have any MagLites?" Steve asked.

"No," Jack replied.

"Wouldn't hurt for you to have a couple of the 3 cell variety that use the same D-cells the Coleman lanterns use," Steve suggested. "By the way, what do you do for the construction company?"

"I'm their Chief of Security," Jack explained. "You wouldn't think that a construction company would need security, but we keep guards at the construction sites at night to prevent theft and during the day to keep people out of the way of the trucks."

"You mentioned that you had a second Mark II that's been modified," Steve said. "What's it got, an integral suppressor?"

"Bull barrel," Jack replied thinking quickly.

“Jack I could care less if you have a suppressed .22 pistol,” Steve assured him.

“I’ll show you my bull-barreled Mark II sometime,” Jack conceded.

The bull-barreled Mark II actually had an integral suppressor installed by Sound Technology in Pelham, AL. Jack had a friend who had a friend and he, too had M4-FA suppressors for his AR-15 rifles and the FA762S suppressors with the new quick attach mounts for all of his M1A rifles. Jack hadn’t known Steve long enough to open up to him and say, “Sure, Mr. LEO, I’ve got a whole box of those suppressors myself.” One thing that Jack did notice was that Steve had a large amount of ammunition, most of it from Black Hills. The .45 ACP was the Speer 200-grain +P Gold Dot, the 5.56x45mm was equally divided between the 52-grain match HP and the 55-grain soft point while the 7.62x51mm was equally divided between the 168-grain match HP and the 165-grain SPBT.

“What’s with the Black Hills ammo, Steve?” Jack asked.

“It’s maybe a little higher quality and the match stuff is very accurate,” Steve replied. “My rule of thumb is 1,000 rounds per handgun and 5,000 rounds per rifle. I use the tactical loads in the 12-gauge mainly because I get it at a discount. I have 500 rounds for each of the shotguns and 20 bricks of assorted .22LR rounds.”

The two men went back upstairs and noticed that Sandy and Moira were getting along very well and were visiting about ‘girl stuff’. Steve went to the patio and lit his gas grill to pre-heat it with Jack tagging along.

“Care for a beer?” Steve asked.

“Do you have a coke or something?” Jack asked.

“You don’t drink?” Steve inquired.

“Rarely,” Jack said. “Sometimes after working all day in the hot sun, a cold one tastes good, but I don’t drink often. My dad was a drunk and I just never got into drinking.”

“There’s a six-pack of beer in the refrigerator if you change your mind,” Steve said. “I bought it a few months ago when we had company but I don’t drink much either. I never know when I might get called out.”

“When do you want to move that freezer?” Jack asked.

“Are you free next Saturday, Jack?” Steve asked. “You can bring Moira and Sandy and I can show the two of you around our mountain retreat. It’s a 3-day weekend.”

“I’m free,” Jack replied. “I’ll ask Moira and see what she says. How far is it to your cabin?”

“About an hour,” Steve said. “Say it just occurred to me. You might want to store your extra stuff up there instead of in a storage locker. We could erect a storage shed and you could use that. You can probably get one of those ‘assemble it yourself’ buildings for about what a couple of months’ rent would be on a locker.”

It didn’t quite work out that way, but the next weekend when Jack and Moira showed up, he had an Arrow Vinyl Murrayhill 14’ by 31’ shed for them to erect. Jack had gotten it on clearance for about half of the MSRP. Steve told him it would probably be a 2-day project to build a foundation and erect the shed. However, since it was a 3-day weekend, if Jack and Moira were agreeable, they could just spend the weekend at that cabin and erect the shed. Jack had pretty much assumed as much and he’d asked Moira if she minded spending the weekend at the cabin if it came to that. She’d given him a peck and packed a bag for the weekend. He already had his bag packed and a few extra things in the toolbox on his truck. He helped Steve load the freezer on the back of Steve’s pickup and they headed for the mountains.

Sandy had suspected that their new friends would end up spending the weekend at the cabin and she had gone shopping on Friday and picked up enough groceries for the two of them for a week or the four of them for the weekend. Steve wasn’t on call for this particular weekend, which made it especially nice. Steve led the way and they stopped by a Home Depot where they picked up anchor kits and 2×4’s and plywood to build a floor for the shed. Then they made their way up to the cabin. After unloading the freezer and getting it plugged in and running, the women got busy planning dinner and the two men leveled a place to erect the shed. Next, they installed the anchors and built the floor. They stopped for lunch and then started to erect the building.

“You could darn near live in this shed,” Steve laughed.

“Actually, it’s bigger than my trailer,” Jack agreed. “It’s almost twice as wide and about 7’ longer. But I only bought this big of a shed because it was on clearance and I could get it for about the price of one half as big. I ordered 3 deluxe 1-year supplies of food from that place in Idaho and I figured on putting in several of those 25-gallon tanks of propane.”

“Even 3 of the food units will only take about 100 cubic feet of space,” Steve pointed out. “This shed must have over 3,000 cubic feet of storage space.”

“If I remember correctly,” Jack replied, “The salesman said 3,663 cubic feet. We could run electricity to the shed and you could use it for your freezer.”

“You wouldn’t mind?” Steve asked.

“Heck no,” Jack said. “Maybe we could pick up some of those 25-gallon propane tanks when we pick up the conduit and electrical panel.”

“We’ve been talking about putting in some extra deep cycle batteries,” Steve said.

“Well, there is room for a lot of batteries in the shed,” Jack pointed out.

“I’ll talk to Sandy about that,” Steve suggested. “I learned a long time ago that I could have about anything I want if I talk it over with her first. On the other hand, if I go off halfcocked and just get it, she doesn’t always agree with my choices.”

“That might be good advice for me,” Jack said. “I’ve been thinking about asking Moira to marry me but I don’t want to ruin a good friendship by getting married.”

Jack, if you treat her like an equal partner, you’ll be fine,” Steve advised.

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After dinner, Steve brought up the idea of wiring the shed and moving their batteries and inverters out there. Sandy said that she thought it was a good idea. The batteries were fairly old and needed to be replaced. She’d been checking out batteries on the net and in her opinion, the Optima AGM battery was the best. They weren’t cheap, but, they’d had the money they’d been putting away to replace the batteries and now was as good of a time as any. So if the guy’s wanted to wire the shed and move the inverters, she’d order the batteries and they could install them the following weekend.

“What would you like to do Moira?” Jack asked.

“That’s fine by me Jack,” Moira replied. “That stuff you ordered should be in by next Friday anyway and we’d have to bring it up here.”

“Jack ordered 3 of the deluxe 1-year food supplies, Sandy,” Steve explained.

“You might want to put 2 years of the food in the shed and one year in your trailer, Jack,” Sandy suggested. “That way if you have to come here because of some emergency you will have food on hand if you get delayed.”

Jack hadn’t spent all of his earnings on guns. He put 15% of every paycheck in savings as a rainy day fund no matter what. He was single and had limited expenses compared to his income, not that he was getting rich on his job. He had enough money that he could afford to keep \$5,000 in cash in his interest bearing checking account and a substantial amount in a savings account. The two accounts were linked providing overdraft protection and so he could transfer money between the two accounts. He also had a money market account with one of the very stable funds. He could write up to 3 checks per month on that account without incurring any charges. Jack wasn’t rich by any stretch of the imagination, but he was a careful spender and had very few needs. Buying the shed had put a dent in his savings and he’d paid for the food out of his money market account. He still had more than enough to buy Moira a diamond and put in plenty of propane.

Big John – Chapter 2 – A Whole New Beginning

Sandy pulled out her laptop and went on the net where she ordered the Optima batteries. The next day the 2 men got up early and went first to Home Depot for a new electrical panel and wiring. Their next stop was at the propane dealer's; he did a good business on Sunday's refilling propane bottles, and Jack bought 20 of the 25-gallon bottles filled to 22½ gallons. After they finished erecting the shed, the men put the bottles inside and broke for lunch. After lunch, they put in the new panel and wired the shed.

Moira had confided in Sandy that she thought Jack might be thinking of asking her to marry him. But if he didn't get off the dime, she was going to propose to him. They cooked baby back ribs on the grill that Sunday evening and had French fries and Bush's beans as sides. Sandy and Steve occupied the master bedroom in the cabin and Jack and Moira had taken one of the two guest bedrooms. On Monday morning, the fellas moved the inverters and the batteries and made the final electrical connections. This freed up one room in the cabin that could be used for other purposes. Steve and Sandy decided to make it into an office. It ended up being something else.

Being a paramedic gave Steve an advantage. It put him at various hospitals at various times and he had deals with several nurses to save him things that the hospital had to discard because they were out of date. It was more than most people thought because hospitals had to immediately remove outdated supplies. In days gone by, it had been even better, but these days with computers and short delivery times from suppliers, it had sharply fallen off. Still he had lots of supplies and the knowledge to use them. In the Special Forces, he'd been a medic and cross-trained as a weapons specialist. That was quite a combination, but it put him in good stead when he'd applied to the Sheriff's Department several years before.

They returned home Monday afternoon and on Tuesday, Sandy received their shipment of food. It had been delayed, probably because of the holiday. On Wednesday, she drove the pickup down and picked up the batteries. She had to make 2 trips, primarily because of the weight. Those batteries completely ate up their battery account and even got into their savings a little. On Tuesday, instead of lifting weights, Jack had made a trip to a jeweler he knew. He'd gotten Moira a friendship ring about 18 months before, so he knew her size, and he had his eye on a particularly nice emerald cut diamond. After this past weekend, any doubts he had about getting married had been erased and he was ready to take the plunge. The jeweler talked him out of the emerald cut and into a rather nice 1.5 carat brilliant cut diamond and told him the rings would be ready on Friday evening.

Friday afternoon his food shipment had come in and he decided to just store all of it in the shed and pick up some MRE's for the trailer. So after he picked up the rings, he stopped by a preparedness store and bought 5 cases of the MRE's. He had also had time to look at gun safes and was thinking of replacing his gun cabinets with one large safe installed in the shed. He asked Moira to pick up some meat and desserts for the weekend and he'd pay her back. He checked with Steve and learned that it would take

both of the pickups to haul the batteries and they'd have to put the food on top. So he'd gotten up very early on Saturday morning and picked up his load of batteries and then returned and loaded the food. Moira showed up just as he was finishing and they headed to Steve and Sandy's.

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After they got to the cabin and had everything unloaded, they installed the new batteries using the new cables that Sandy had bought along with the new batteries and got them started charging. Steve said they'd pull the old batteries the next day before they left and haul them back home and Sandy could sell them for the lead. On Saturday evening after dinner, Jack pulled out the box with the diamond.

"I've never done this before," he said, "So you're going to have to make allowances."

"What are you talking about?" Moira asked.

He opened the box and said, "Moira, will you marry me?"

"Gee, I don't know," Moira said. "You got a steady job and good prospects? Of course, what took you so long to ask?"

"Big step for a man my age, Moira and a lot of responsibility," Jack admitted. "I guess you can thank Steve. He told me just to be equal partners and everything would be alright."

"I can get next Friday off if you'd like to go to Vegas," she said.

"Don't you want a long engagement and a fancy wedding?" Jack asked.

"Jack, a long engagement and a fancy wedding are a waste of time and money," Moira said.

"Ok. I'll get Friday off too," he agreed.

Later that evening, Sandy noticed the smile in Moira's eyes and looked at her left hand.

"Well congratulations you two, when is the big day?" Sandy asked.

"Friday," Moira answered.

"Friday?" Sandy asked. "Are you guys in a hurry?"

"No, but what's the point in waiting?" Moira said. "We've been tap dancing long enough and I want to set the hook before he changes his mind."

The following Friday was February 11, 2005. Later, Jack took Steve aside and asked him if he'd be free on Friday to be his best man. Steve was honored and delighted and he had Friday and the weekend off. Meanwhile, Moira was having a similar conversation with Sandy and Sandy agreed to be the Matron of Honor. Jack said that they'd fly to Vegas and spend the weekend, all on him. It would still be cheaper than a fancy wedding and Moira didn't have any parents to pay for the wedding. Which was, in and of itself, an interesting story. The short version was murder/suicide. Her mother had killed her dad and taken her own life, all over some woman the dad was having an affair with. Moira's sister had gone off to college and for all practical purposes, disappeared.

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All the lonely people... Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people... Where do they all belong?
[Eleanor Rigby]

You Are Only as Sick as Your Secrets... If we understand that the "universal human phobia" is close-range, interpersonal aggression, and that we are systematically enabling our combatants to kill in combat, then we can also begin to understand that aggression from a human enemy will result in a magnitude of trauma that is generally unlike anything else that a human being can encounter. If you have never experienced such a trauma, you are apt to try to place it in terms of your own experiences and traumas, but the reality is that this will be a fundamentally flawed exercise.

Moira hadn't mentioned the tragedy in her family that had left her and her sister orphans and her unable to have children. But she couldn't go into a marriage with that hanging over her because she rightly feared that the secret could destroy the marriage. She had remained single as long as she had waiting for just the right man and she knew that Jack was the right man.

"Jack, I have something that I must tell you before we can get married," Moira said.

"What, you've been married before?" Jack kidded.

"No, I've never been married, Jack," she said. "I've been waiting for you all of my life. What I have to tell you isn't easy. It's about how my parents died and the aftermath."

"I always assumed they'd been killed in an accident," Jack said. "Tell me what really happened, please."

"My dad got the hots for a secretary in his office and had an affair with her," Moira explained. "My mother found out about it and killed him and then turned the gun on herself."

"Gee, I'm sorry, Moira," Jack said. "That must have been tough for you."

"It gets worse, Jack," Moira said. "I walked in the house right as she was trying to shoot him and tried to stop her. All I got for my trouble was a bullet. She killed him and then herself while I was lying on the floor, bleeding."

"Is that what the scar is?" Jack asked. "I assumed you had your appendix out."

"The bullet came in at an angle and tore up my uterus," she continued. "They had to do a hysterectomy to save my life. The doctor made the scar look like an appendix operation to save me needless questions."

"I'm so sorry, Moira," Jack continued. "You're not trying to back out of accepting my proposal are you, because if you are, you're going to have a fight on your hands?"

"No, but I didn't want you to be disappointed when we turned out to not have any kids," she replied.

"Moira, I was 21 in 1973 so I'll be 52 this year," Jack said. "That's a little old to be having children anyway. I might be dead before they got out of high school."

"I'll be 40 this year, Jack," Moira pointed out. "Even if we could have kids, I'd be a little old to start a family."

"You see," he said, "It worked out alright. Sandy can't have any children either."

"She hadn't said anything and I was wondering," Moira admitted.

"Steve never really explained, either," Jack admitted. "Nobody needs to know your business but I'm grateful you told me. Then I won't be wondering if there's something wrong with me."

"So we're still on for Friday?" she asked.

"You can back out if you want, but you'll have to give the diamond back," he said with a wink.

From a third party's point of view, it wasn't necessarily a match made in Heaven. Jack was a little old to be getting married for the first time and Moira was a little past her prime. Then again, who was to say that the match wasn't made in Heaven? They loved each other and had more things in common than they had initially realized. Late Sunday morning, they unhooked the old batteries and loaded them into the two trucks. All of them might have fit into one truck but it would have made the load a little on the heavy side. When they arrived at Steve and Sandy's, they unloaded Jack's pickup and he and Moira went to the trailer. They talked about what to wear and a few final details and he said that he'd see her Friday morning so they could get to the airport and fly to Vegas. Jack had to buy his suits at the big and tall shop and they were awfully expensive. He had a relatively new suit that Moira had never seen him wear and decided that it would

be good enough. He arranged Friday off and moved his trailer to a different 1,000 Trails on Thursday. Friday morning he was up and around early and ready to go by 7am.

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Jack had made reservations at the Luxor, the only 30-story pyramid shaped hotel and casino in the world. The flight left around 10:30 and Steve and Sandy showed up about 7:30am. Moira finally showed up at 8am and they headed for the airport. These days, they weren't kidding when they said to get to the airport at least an hour early; two hours was better on most days. They checked their luggage and went through all of the security and got on the plane. An hour later, they were in Vegas. An hour after that, they were standing in line at the Clerk's office and an hour after that they were married. Friday was a busy day at the Clerk's Office because Monday was the 14th. However, there was no one in the Magistrates office and they were in and out in 20 minutes. This particular magistrate didn't bother with a lot of flowery speeches; it was do you and do you and an exchange of rings. Sort of a slam, bam, thank you ma'am wedding.

When they got to the Luxor and checked in, Jack went to the cashier and got 4 stacks of the \$1 'coins'. He presented these to Sandy, Moira and Steve and wished them luck. Of course it would have to be him that hit a \$234,000 jackpot. Which was more money than he'd ever seen at one time in his whole life. He took enough cash to buy 20 Eagles and 2 rolls each of pre-65 dimes, quarters and half-dollars and converted the money immediately. The remainder he took as a marker against the casino. The Luxor comp'd their stay hoping they would end up spending the winnings on the casino floor. But, when the four of them ran out of the \$1 'coins' they stopped gambling. They had a nice dinner and retired for the evening.

The next morning, Jack redeemed the marker for a check and they headed back to the airport for the flight home. It took them a lot longer to get through the airport because earlier that morning the Department of Homeland Security had raised the Threat Level from Yellow to Orange. There was a non-specified threat and fortunately they didn't have much luggage and made their flight ok. McCarran seemed to have a larger influx of people than outflow, probably due to the next day being Valentine's Day. When they arrived home, Jack went to a store to pick up 2 knives he had ordered the previous week. The knives, Cold Steel Laredo Bowies had been special ordered and were in. As a favor to Jack, the shop owner made certain that the top 4½" long fully sharpened false edge was just as sharp as the blade itself.

Jack apologized to Moira and told her he had one more stop to make. There should be a package waiting for him at the private post office box he maintained as his permanent address. When they got there, a large box was waiting for him and he signed for it and they headed for home. He told Moira that with the remaining \$158,480 he had from the Luxor, they should perhaps consider buying a home. The Luxor had withheld 28% of his winnings for taxes and he'd taken \$10,000 to purchase the Eagles and silver coins. The check in his wallet was for \$158,480. (\$234,000 – 65,520 withholding - \$10,000 =

\$158,480). Jack had taken \$5,000 in cash against contingencies when they'd gone to Vegas and had used some of that money to pay for the 2 knives.

When they got to Moira's apartment, where they'd be living until they had something permanent, Jack gave his new wife a roll of dimes, quarters and half-dollars plus the new Laredo Bowie. He told her that he was taking the next morning off, cashing the check and converting the remaining money into gold and silver Eagles and holding those until they decided what property they wanted to buy. In view of the raised Threat Level, he viewed his proposed actions as justified and Moira agreed.

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As planned, the next morning they were up early and Moira headed to work and Jack headed to the bank. The bank manager authorized cashing the check but warned Jack that he was foolish walking around with a briefcase containing almost \$160,000. Jack told him that he was armed because he was going to work immediately after one more small business transaction and headed for a company who sold gold and silver coins. Thinking better of his plans, Jack bought 2 more rolls of the silver dimes, quarters and half-dollars and took the remainder in gold Eagles. That morning, gold was running around \$425 an ounce and most of his purchase was of the Eagles. The ratio between the prices of gold and silver vary, running anywhere for 35:1 to 70:1 as a general rule. On this day, it was in the low sixties and Jack bought as many one ounce silver Eagles as one ounce gold Eagles. Weight wise, the one ounce gold eagles represented 25% of his gold purchases. When Jack got to work, he put the contents of the bag in his office safe.

Gold had been sliding upward slowly and to recover his investment, Jack would have to wait for the buy price of the coins to exceed the sell price he had to pay. He never got the chance to need to worry about it. During the early afternoon hours on February 14, 2005, barely 48 hours after Jack and Moira got married, someone, presumably terrorists, detonated dirty bombs in 3 different locations in Las Vegas, NV and 2 similar bombs in Atlantic City, NJ. Had it been a typical day in Las Vegas, the number of persons affected by the attack would have been substantially less. However, because of the unusually high number of people in Vegas to get married, the results were significantly more dramatic. The attack in Atlantic City had caught far fewer people and had a proportionately smaller effect.

Moira called Jack from work and told him about what she'd seen on the TV screens in the electronics department of the store where she worked. He suggested in the strongest possible terms that she arrange for some time off and head home. She told him that the company had decided to close the store for the rest of the day or possibly longer. She would see him when he got home. Jack then called Steve and asked if he'd heard the news. Steve, of course, had and had called Sandy and asked her to take the remainder of the day off. Steve also told Jack that he'd better think about picking up his trailer because the Sheriff's Department had warning that more bombings were ex-

pected. He'd be home as soon as his shift ended in about 6 hours. Homeland Security had raised the Threat Level to Red and the US military had gone to DEFCON 3.

Jack checked with his boss who had given him a nice check when he'd shown up at work as a wedding present. The boss said Jack could have the remainder of the week off, but to check in from time to time. Jack emptied his safe, got in his pickup and headed for the Bank of America where the construction company banked and cashed the check. He got all \$5,000 in cash, with bundles of 1's, 5's 10's and 20's and the remainder in rolls of coins. With that out of the way, he stopped and filled his truck plus several of the military style 5-gallon gas cans he'd picked up for diesel fuel. He had 10 cans, or 50-gallons worth of diesel, plus the 50 gallons in his fuel tanks. He stopped by 1,000 Trails, hooked up the trailer and headed to Moira's apartment. There, they emptied out her kitchen and got her clothes and headed to Steve and Sandy's.

Steve had arrived just minutes before they had and was busy moving everything up from the basement and packing it in his pickup and a 6'x12' trailer. Jack gave him a hand and in a little over an hour they had everything loaded except for the deep freezer. They disconnected Jack's trailer, loaded the freezer onto Jack's pickup and reconnected the trailer. The light was failing, with about 40 minutes to sunset. Steve did a quick walk through making sure he hadn't missed anything and they headed for the mountains. Steve's generator was a 12kw China diesel and it had gone into Jack's pickup with the freezer. On the way, Steve stopped 3 times and bought 10 more 5-gallon metal gas cans each time and had them filled with diesel at the nearest service station that sold diesel. These cans ended up in Jack's trailer.

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It was well after dark when they arrived at the cabin in the mountains. They put the diesel fuel, all 40 cans of it, in the shed and worked late into the evening moving the supplies from Steve's basement into that shed. The shed seemed to filling up nicely and Jack was very happy that he'd bought the larger shed. During the few hours it had taken them to get organized, loaded, secure the additional diesel fuel and some PRI-D, bombs had been exploded in Manhattan, the Chicago Loop, the San Francisco Financial District and in a large shopping mall in Orange County, California. Despite the difference in their size, the two Laredoan rigs Jack had picked up at the private post office fit him and Moira perfectly. He gave her the nickel-plated 7½" and 4⅝" Vaqueros. Steve and Sandy were both wearing Kimbers. They ate supper and retired to the living room to watch TV and catch up on the news. Jack and Moira also carried the Bowie knives.

Over the space of 20-minutes, the announcer said, three bombs were exploded in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Later, at irregular intervals, bombs were exploded in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and a large shopping mall in Anaheim. The Department of Homeland Security has raised the Threat level to Red and President Bush has declared martial law with a dusk to dawn curfew for everyone except Law Enforcement Officers and emergency personnel. While the bombs did only nominal physical damage, the amount of radioactive materials dispersed by the bombs covers areas of varying sizes

with the two largest being in New York and Anaheim. NEST teams and federal troops have been dispatched to the areas to begin an immediate cleanup. An unnamed White House source said that the cleanup could take a matter of weeks and cost \$10's of millions. We will have follow-up coverage of these unfolding events on our 5am broadcast."

"Dang," Steve said. "I accidentally left my pager at home."

"In a pig's eye," Sandy said. "You never go anywhere without that pager."

"That's beside the point honey," Steve said. "I distinctly remember turning the pager off and putting it in my sock drawer in the bureau."

"I converted my Las Vegas winnings into gold and silver this morning," Jack said. "Do you have someplace secure to store the Eagles and silver?"

"There's a small safe in the master bedroom," Steve said, "You can put the coins in there if you'd like. Do you have any cash?"

"My boss gave Moira and me a \$5,000 wedding present this morning," Jack explained. "I cashed that check and got it in rolls of coins plus 1's, 5's 10's and 20's. I spent some of it to buy those 10 cans and fill them and the pickup. Plus I have the money I didn't spend in Vegas or when I got home."

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The cabin, which was several miles off the beaten path, had telephone service but no outside electrical service. The primary access to the cabin was via a Forest Service private road. It could also be reached using a 4 wheel drive vehicle and cutting across country. Sandy could access the Internet via the phone line or her cell phone and SBC's dialup number. Because of the distance between the nearest phone office and the cabin, DSL service was unavailable. Television service was from a satellite feed to a dish mounted on the cabin.

"I've tried to keep about the same amount on hand in cash, too," Steve said. "So I guess we're in good shape on cash. Where did you get those knives and gun belts?"

"I ordered the gun belts from Kirkpatrick Leather Company in Laredo, Texas and the knives through a retailer who sells Cold Steel knives," Jack replied. "Both were waiting for us when we got home from Vegas yesterday and we picked them up on the way home."

The TV screen flashed 'Bulletin' and Steve turned the volume back up.

Headline News has received word of an additional attempted bomb attack, the announcer droned. The latest attempt was at the Three-Mile Island nuclear generating plant 10 miles from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Four individuals attempted to enter the

reactor grounds but were observed from the guard tower and subsequently arrested. The towers were a response to demands for better security against terrorist assaults at the nation's 104 commercial nuclear power plants. The Nuclear Regulatory Agency, however, never revealed details of those requirements in effect since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The agency had required more security guards, better weapons, stricter background checks and greater restrictions on who may enter the plants, but the details of those requirements were never revealed by the agency, until today."

Steve killed the volume again when the announcer got off into recapping the other events of the day they'd already heard about several times.

"Well, this is a fine mess we've gotten ourselves into," Steve said trying to inject a little humor.

"To think that a few short weeks ago, I've have been up the creek without a paddle scares the crap out of me," Jack observed. "I pretty much gutted my savings between getting the supplies you suggested and had I not gotten lucky in Vegas, I'd be close to broke, almost anyway. But I don't know how much difference the money I picked up over the weekend is going to make. If this is the end of the attacks, we're going to be okay. Sandy and you have what, 5 of those food units from Walton and Moira and I have 3 so I guess we have food for a couple of years. But, my friend, we don't have a lot of fuel for your generator or our pickups."

"I was thinking the same thing Jack," Steve said. "We each have most of our available cash with us so we could try to find a diesel tank and get it filled."

"If I can get a bank to take a check," Jack noted, "I still have about \$8,500 in my money market account. That would help, but only if I can get it. Plus I have the minimum balance I maintain in my high interest checking account and the money in my savings."

"Let's sleep on it and see what Tuesday brings," Steve suggested.

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They were basically exhausted but sleep came hard for both couples that Valentine's Day evening. They finally dozed off but perhaps the concern over what the new day would bring saw all four of them up early the next morning. Sandy and Moira put together a lite breakfast and the men were glued to the satellite TV feed trying to sort everything out. There had been a run on the grocery stores and even a disturbance or two as people frantically tried to put up supplies against possible shortages of food. After breakfast, they dug out a phone book and looked for a fuel distributor in a nearby community. They found several and Steve slipped into his Sheriff's Department uniform and they both went armed.

It took 3 distributors before they could find an empty 500-gallon fuel tank. This guy wouldn't take a check stating it was cash only. He didn't have any drivers available to

deliver fuel either. He had plenty of fuel, but the price was a dollar a gallon higher than the morning of the day before, which put #2 diesel fuel at about \$3.50 a gallon. They swung by an auto parts store after the dealer loaded the tank on Jack's pickup, just to get a funnel. They drove back to the cabin and spent two hours getting the tank off the pickup and set in a hastily built cradle constructed from the left over lumber from the floor of the shed. They emptied the 40 5-gallon cans into the tank and headed back down the mountain to pick up another 200-gallons of diesel. When they got there the distributor's facility was locked up tighter than a drum and they were forced to go to a service station and buy retail fuel which was now selling for \$4.499 a gallon for #2 diesel. They refilled the 40 cans and their tanks and returned home.

When they got back to the cabin it was getting late so they emptied the additional 200-gallons of fuel into the large tank and got cleaned up for supper. The 2 men had been on a dead run and hadn't eaten since the lite breakfast they'd had that morning. It was beginning to get dark outside by the time they finished supper and they retired to the living room to see what developments had occurred since morning. Not good, and that was obvious from the start. There had been major disturbances in several cities as people had tried to stock up on food only to find the grocery store shelves nearly bare. It was also more than obvious that several service stations were taking advantage of the panic and price gouging was evident everywhere.

That evening, Jack pulled the nearly empty propane tank from his trailer and replaced it with a full bottle. On Wednesday they'd see about getting it refilled and picking up more diesel fuel. Both couples retired early primarily because of another hard day. It turned out that early to bed meant early to rise and they were all up and eating a hardier breakfast shortly after dawn.

"We should see if we can get another 10 of those 5-gallon gas cans," Jack suggested. "That way, we can at least top off that fuel tank and if that distributor will stick around, maybe we can make a second trip, top off our fuel tanks and add another 250-gallons.

They were at a 24-hour outlet by 7am, had picked up all 15 of their remaining 5-gallon cans that had seemed to have doubled in price since Steve had bought some earlier. They now had a total of 55 of the 5-gallon cans. They got a case, 12 32-ounce bottles of PRI-D and went to the distributors. He topped off their fuel tanks and filled the 55 cans, at \$4.50 a gallon, wholesale. He also told them that he'd be closing in a couple hours and that their best bet to catch him was to come back Thursday morning if they needed more fuel. When they got home, they emptied 20 of the 55 cans into the fuel tank and added enough PRI-D to finish stabilizing the fuel. Jack had never gotten a chance to pick up the large gun safe he wanted to buy but he didn't consider that much of a concern anymore. They emptied his 3 gun cabinets and moved them to Steve and Sandy's new office in the house and wiped down all of the weapons and loaded all of them. They also took time to load half of the magazines for the semiautomatic weapons. After, they sorted through the various gear they had and came up with 2 load bearing vests. Steve filled the pouches in his with M16 magazines and Jack opted to go with an M1A.

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Thursday morning they headed back down the hill and refilled the 20 empty fuel cans and topped off the fuel tank in the truck. The sight of an Eagle brought the price down a dollar a gallon so they were able to refill the cans for the same price as the day before, \$4.50 a gallon. They noticed a small retail sporting goods store and a tap on the door brought the owner carrying a 12-gauge.

“Do something for you boys?” he asked.

“Need a couple of sleeping bags and some camping gear,” Jack told him through the door. “We can pay in cash, silver or gold.”

The old man brightened considerably and unlocked the door and stepped back, never really lowering the shotgun. They got 2 carts and went up and down the aisles, selecting 2 sleeping bags, 2 packs—a medium sized for Moira and a large for Jack. To this were added 2 GPS’s, camping axes, cook set, folding toilet with bags, 2 compasses, and an assortment of fishing gear including 2 collapsible rods with reels and line, hooks and sinkers. The store carried a small variety of freeze-dried back packing food in individual meals and meals for two. Jack picked up a good selection of those filling a third cart. He picked up some water filters, 4 2-gallon canteens and a mountain tent.

“That comes to \$2,564,” the old man said. “Did you say something about paying in gold?”

“I can if you prefer,” Jack replied.

“You can have the whole shooting match for 4 gold Eagles,” the old man offered.

“I didn’t see any ammunition,” Jack said.

“Put it in the back room,” the old man replied, “What are you looking for?”

“What do you have?” Jack asked.

“Some of everything and a lot of some things,” the old man said. “Let’s settle up for these things here and I take you in back and you can look.”

Jack forked over the 4 Eagles he fished out of his pants pocket and they left the purchases sit and went into the back room. Here they found large supplies of surplus or overrun 5.56×45mm and 7.62×51mm ammo plus cartridges for all of Jack’s various calibers of guns. Jack got an assortment of the oddball ammo, 2 reloading presses, dies, a reloading manual, powder scale, powder, primers, bullets and 5 cases each of 5.56×45mm and 7.62×51mm. This took 5 gold Eagles and the old man watched the door as they loaded everything into the back of the pickup with the cans of fuel. Jack

noted with mixed feelings that it was definitely a seller's market but his gold had jumped from \$425 an ounce to about \$640 an ounce.

They made one more stop on the way back to the cabin and filled the back seat of the 6-passenger vehicle with toilet paper. When they got home, the cans of fuel went into the shed along with the toilet paper and the other things from the sporting goods store. Both Jack and Steve were realizing what a good choice Jack had made when he bought the big shed. They were going to need a reloading bench and more of the toilet paper and decided they had to risk one more trip down the mountain. On Friday, they picked up several sheets of $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood and some 2x4's and 4x4's at a Home Depot and filled the back seat of the truck and the 6'x12' trailer with toilet paper and a few non-essentials they thought would break up the monotony of living off the long-term storage foods.

Big John – Chapter 3 – One Day at a Time

Returning to the cabin, they unloaded the trailer and back of the truck into the shed and stacked the lumber beside the shed and covered it with a tarp they'd picked up at Home Depot. They had found a Wells Fargo branch but the branch wouldn't cash a check on the money market account. The branch had no choice, however, about Jack 'closing' his checking and savings accounts. Well, he didn't really 'close' them but the balances were now \$1 each. It was a considerable amount of cash, almost \$15,000. Jack still had the \$8,500 in the money market account but it didn't appear he'd be able to access it without returning to his own bank branch. With fuel pushing \$5 a gallon or more, and other things becoming scarce, \$15,000 wouldn't go too far anyway and it was a lot of money. Those Eagles, purchased with the off chance Las Vegas jackpot, were proving to be more important than other forms of money.

The office that Steve and Sandy had envisioned now became an armory/pantry. With the two men's gun collections and their large supply of ammo, there wasn't room for a desk or even a chair. TSHTF on Monday afternoon and it was Friday evening but all of their preparations were complete. If needed, the four of them could hole up in that cabin for a couple of years. Sandy had unplugged the phone from the wall and kept the cell phone off. Not surprisingly, Steve didn't get any calls for him to report in. Jack tried to check in with his office, but got the answering machine. He left a message telling his boss that he'd get there when he could but he didn't know when that would be. The law office where Sandy worked was also closed and the phone at the retail store where Moira worked went unanswered.

Steve was trained by the Special Forces to reload ammunition and on Saturday morning, the men set up the 2 loading presses, one for rifle ammunition and the other for handgun. They didn't anticipate reloading much shotgun ammunition and had gotten 12-gauge and 20-gauge Lee Loader's. The 'rifle' press was a Dillon RL 550B and the handgun press was an AT 500. The old man in the store had several spare heads for the RL 550B and they set up 3, one in 5.56x45mm, a second in 7.62x51mm and the third in 30-06. The old man had also had 2 cases of the Garand ammo in 8-round clips, Korean surplus. With everything completed by early Saturday afternoon, they finally called it quits and sat down to have that beer.

"I'd say that we're better off than about 95% of the population," Steve observed. "We have food, ammo, electricity, water and fuel. I wonder what set those people off to make them do the bombings."

"Maybe we'll find out tonight on the news, Steve," Jack suggested. "Wasn't that election in Iraq scheduled to January 31st?"

"I never thought of that," Steve said. "Maybe the Sunnis won the election and the Shia are taking it out on us."

“The Saudi’s are Wahhabi and that makes them ultra Conservative Sunni. If it were just the Iraqi people, I can’t believe there would have been this much trouble,” Steve suggested. “I’d bet my bottom dollar that it’s all of the foreign Muslim influence in the country.”

“That could very well be, you know,” Jack said. “I seem to recall something on CNN or FOX about bin Laden taking advantage of the situation in Iraq to wage a war against the Americans and the Sunni Muslims. It’s as stupid as it was in this country back during the Great Depression when there was an undercurrent of problems between the Protestants and Catholics.”

“Hey you guys,” Sandy called. “Are you ready for supper? It must be cold sitting out there.”

“Let’s take Sunday off and start putting up some firewood on Monday,” Steve suggested. “I have 2 chainsaws on the back porch and we only have enough wood left for a couple of weeks.”

They went inside and enjoyed a meal of stew and biscuits. After dinner, Steve put an extra log in the high efficiency stove insert they installed in the fireplace a few years before and they all sat down to watch the news. The news wasn’t good. While there had been no more terrorist attacks, the country was really messed up. Bush had recalled the military forces that were helping clean up from the tsunami in the Indian Ocean to help out at home. Not one other nation had offered the US any aid to help in the cleanup of the country. In fact, Canada and México had sealed their borders to prevent a flood of refugees from the States. Bush also announced the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, to be completed over a period of less than a month.

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The four of them slept in on Sunday morning and then had a brunch. Steve and Jack put on their jackets and went to survey the immediate area for downfalls. They found seven and Steve made note of their locations, writing the GPS coordinates on a notebook he always carried. He had 2 chainsaws on the back porch. One was a Stihl MS 210 with a 16” bar for trimming limbs and the other was a Stihl MS 880 with a 36” bar for cutting logs. He also had a pair of splitting mauls and 5 5-gallon cans of stabilized gasoline.

“I think we should have gotten some more gasoline,” Jack noted. “I didn’t give a thought to needing fuel for chainsaws.”

“I have a couple of cases of oil so all we’d need to do is get more gas Jack,” Steve replied. “I guess it’s my fault, we could have used some of those 5-gallon cans we bought for extra gasoline, but I just wasn’t thinking.”

"Maybe the 4 of us should hop in one of the trucks and go down the mountain and see what we can come up with," Jack suggested. "We have a 300-gallon trailer at our construction office that we use to deliver fuel to construction sites. If you want to risk going all the way down there, we could see if it's available."

"I think it's a good idea, Jack, but I'd hate to leave the cabin unattended, especially now," Steve responded. "It might be better if we left Sandy and Moira here and you and I went to get the trailer. Are you sure it's still there?"

"I can't promise, but it was in the shop this past Monday getting new tires put on," Jack said. "The tank was empty so I can't see why anyone would take it."

"What's it got for a hitch?" Steve asked.

"My pickup will pull it so we'll take my truck," Jack suggested.

"My thinking on this is that we'd better be well armed," Steve said. "A couple of guys pulling a trailer with a few hundred gallons of gas would be a tempting target for some. We'll take 2 of my M-16's and the .45's."

They explained to their wives what this trip was all about and made certain that the women both had weapons ready in case they were needed. It didn't seem likely considering the location of the cabin but if the local news were to be believed, they were some crazies out there. It was just after 2 in the afternoon of Sunday, February 20th when Jack and Steve headed down the hill. It only took about an hour and a half to get to the construction company shop and locate the trailer. The men must have stopped working right in the middle of what they were doing because the tires were mounted and balanced but not on the trailer. The construction company also had fuel tanks and 2 pumps, one that delivered diesel and one that delivered unleaded. After they got the trailer mobile, they filled it up and Jack went inside and left a note on his boss's desk explaining that he borrowed the trailer and taken 300-gallons of unleaded.

The company's office was in Vernon and it wasn't the best area in the city. They mostly stuck to main streets and got on the I-10 as soon as practicable. They were headed east when they ran into a roadblock. It was a Deputy that Steve knew from work.

"Where have you been, Steve?" the friend asked. "They've been looking high and low for you. They tried your pager, your home, your cabin and your cell phone, but got no response."

"I've been helping some people deal with this little disaster we have going on," Steve replied. "What's the latest status?"

"Have you been watching the news?" his friend asked.

"Yes, of course," Steve replied.

“Then you know about as much as we do which isn’t a whole lot is it?” the Deputy half laughed. “Say, what should I tell the Watch Commander about seeing you?”

“I’d rather you not mention it at all,” Steve said. “But if you must say something, tell him I’m helping some people get through this craziness and that I’ll check in as soon as I can.”

“Where are you, up at your cabin?” the friend asked.

“Not at the moment, no,” Steve replied honestly.

“Who’s your friend?” the Deputy asked.

“This is Jack Douglas,” Steve replied. “He’s the Chief of Security for the construction firm whose trailer we’re pulling. Some of the firm’s people have gone to ground in the mountains and they needed fuel for their chain saws.”

“Get out of here and go help those people,” his friend said. “It was nice not seeing you.”

“Very clever,” Jack said as they resumed their journey. “Nothing you said was a lie, but it sure let him jump to all of the wrong conclusions.”

“You can go to hell for lying, Jack,” Steve chuckled.

“Pull over at that auto parts store and I’ll see about getting some PRI-G,” Jack suggested when they exited the freeway.

The auto parts store had 2 cases of PRI-G for small gas engines and Jack bought both. The mixture ratio for this particular stabilizer was 8 ounces per 20 gallons of gasoline. Each case held 24 bottles so they had enough stabilizer for 960 gallons of gas. Once they had the stabilizer, they headed back up the mountain. They arrived just in time for supper.

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“Have any trouble?” Steve asked.

“No, it was as quiet as a cemetery,” Sandy said.

“We picked up 300 gallons of gas for the chain saws so we have enough gas to cut a lot of wood,” Jack explained.

“I ran into Marty on the I-10,” Steve said. “I implied that I was helping some people who worked for Jack’s construction firm who had gone to ground. He said they’d been trying to get in touch with me.”

"I unplugged the phone and have been keeping the cell phone off," Sandy said. "I figured that's what you wanted since you broke with tradition and left your pager at our house."

"You have that right," Steve smiled. "What's for supper, I'm starved?"

Steve and Sandy had noticed that there was a new ease in Jack and Moira's relationship. It was something that went beyond their getting married but they hadn't said anything and neither Steve nor Sandy wanted to pry. The two couples had gone through a substantial amount of cash and several of the one ounce gold coins but they were pretty well set. Overall, Jack wasn't in a much different position than he had been in before he'd gotten lucky and hit that jackpot in Vegas. He had a little more money, but at the moment there wasn't a lot to spend the money on anyway.

Bush had initially suspended commercial aviation for two weeks pending some resolution to the immediate crisis. The suspension had been extended indefinitely. The National Guards from the various states had been federalized and the roadblock the two men had gone through was but an example of restrictions on travel that were set up around the country. Congress hadn't confirmed the federal appeals court judge to take Ridge's place so Ridge was still the director of Homeland Security. It had only been a few days since the attacks so not much was being accomplished in terms of cleanup of the radioactive wastes that had inundated several blocks of several cities. The immediate death toll hadn't been particularly high, just a few people killed in the explosions. People had fled the scenes almost immediately so no one was certain, at this point at least, what the long-term effects would be. FEMA had been mobilized and together with the Red Cross and National Guard units had established several refugee centers for persons affected by the explosions.

"Say, when I think about it, that was kind of strange," Steve said.

"What was strange, Steve?" Sandy asked.

"Generally speaking, I-10 is the jurisdiction of the CHP," Steve replied. "The San Bernardino Sheriff's Department usually defers to them or the National Guard when roadblocks are needed."

I wouldn't make too much of it Steve," Jack suggested. "Maybe they were just helping out the CHP or the Guard."

"It could be, I suppose," Steve allowed, "But none of our emergency planning envisioned our doing the Interstate roadblocks. I would have thought that Marty would have had more information, too. The only explanation for that is that the government isn't filling in people at the local level."

"How much firewood are we planning on cutting tomorrow?" Jack asked.

“Jack, we will start out by trimming the branches of the closest tree and hauling them back to the cabin,” Steve suggested. “That should minimize the amount of splitting we’ll have to do. I wish we had a mechanical splitter. Those splitting mauls work fine, but it’s back breaking work.”

“Why don’t you look in the yellow pages and find someone who sells splitters?” Moira asked.

“We don’t need much,” Steve said, “We not in a business here.”

“So look, silly,” Sandy said. “If you can find someone who sells a firewood splitter, you can go down the mountain tomorrow and get one.”

“Jack, are you up to risking one more trip?” Steve asked.

“If it’s important, I am,” Jack replied.

“Ok, I’ll look in the yellow pages in the morning and call around,” Steve said. “But I don’t want to spend a lot of money and I don’t want to travel too far.”

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Monday morning Steve was up early and by the time the stores began to open he had 4 numbers that weren’t that far away. He called until he got an answer and found a machine. It was a horizontal splitter with a log lifter attached and was available for immediate sale. The two men climbed in the pickup and drove to the business. At least this guy didn’t try to hold them up too badly; he was willing to sell for MSRP. They got a jug of extra hydraulic fluid and items the dealer recommended and returned home. They had lunch and drove out to the woods to trim the nearest tree. Steve started cutting off 16” logs from the base of the trunk and Jack started trimming off limbs. When they had the pickup stacked as full as they could get it, they knocked off and returned to the cabin. As they unloaded the pickup, they sorted the wood into a pile that required splitting and one that did not. They still had a couple of hours of light left so they fired up the engine on the splitter and made short work of splitting the logs. They then stacked the logs and cleaned up for supper. Steve said they could do one trip a day for a week and they’d be close to having enough firewood to last until spring.

On Tuesday morning they set out to gather more firewood and were back before noon with a load. They unloaded the truck, sorting as they went, and had a bite of lunch. Jack suggested that they go for a second load and finish off the tree they had been working on. Steve acquiesced and by supper time they had finished off the tree, hauled it back, sorted and split the wood and had it all stacked. Jack hadn’t been getting much exercise since after the wedding and he was really enjoying the workout. After dinner they sat down to catch the latest news and it could only be described as interesting. The same governments who had said the US military had to be out of their tsunami wracked coun-

tries were now complaining because Bush called the troops home to deal with the terrorist attacks.

“What I don’t understand is how these people think,” Moira said. “People were complaining about the amount of aid the US was or wasn’t giving 6 weeks ago and then when the US needs help, they’ve never heard of us. And some of those governments as much as told us that they wanted us out of their countries. What’s the death toll from that tsunami now, about 175,000?”

“Pretty close,” Jack said. “What’s your the point, honey?”

“I don’t know what my point is,” Moira responded. “It just all seems wrong somehow.”

“In some of the third world nations, the infant mortality rate is pretty high and always has been, Moira,” Sandy commented. “They have learned to accept that and some of their religious beliefs reflect that acceptance. Did you see the article a few weeks ago where several different women all claimed that one of the surviving children was theirs? In their pain and grief, they were grasping at straws and any baby for them to raise would ease their pain. The big worry in some circles was that the governments of some of those countries would steal a lot of the aid money. It’s difficult to make sense out of something we can’t understand.”

“I think the governments are trying to appease some of their terrorist minority groups so that they don’t lose their power base,” Jack added. “And you can’t expect people who can’t help themselves to help us, can you?”

“Then explain to me why Canada and México closed their borders,” Moira asked.

“How can I explain something that I don’t understand myself?” Jack replied.

“Do you want to get more firewood tomorrow or take the day off, Jack?” Steve changed the subject.

“We marked down about 7 trees as I recall,” Jack said. “If we spend about 9 or 10 days, we should have all of the downed trees in the immediate area harvested and that might help improve our security. And, it will give us a large amount of firewood on hand so that we can concentrate on other things later. It’s only been about 8 days since the attacks and my suspicion is that things will get worse before they get better.”

“Fine by me, but no manual labor on Sundays from now on,” Steve said. “We need that one day of rest a week, even God did.”

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They didn’t need to use the generator for electricity because the solar panels and batteries pretty much covered their needs during the days. Nevertheless, the men put the

generator next to the shed and wired it into the electrical panel through a manual transfer switch Steve had picked up with the other electrical parts. He really wished that he had some way to get his 300-gallon tank from their home but unless they could empty it, load it, move and install it; it was beyond a reasonable possibility at the moment. Still, if the emergency went on for a while and they got enough empty cans, they could move the tank and then go back to the construction company and refill the cans after they had the fuel back in the tank. They also took time to erect a canopy over the generator to keep off the snow and rain. These things were accomplished during the evenings after they hauled 2 loads of wood and had it sorted, split and stacked.

They had the last of the trees cleaned up in 10 days and enough firewood for the foreseeable future. That worked out about right because they got a major snow, forcing them to run the generator for a week. The generator used about ½ gallon per hour at full load or about 84 gallons of fuel during the week they needed it. That, with the fuel they burned in the pickup only gave them 22 empty 5-gallon cans. To move the tank from the house would require 60 empty cans.

“I don’t suppose there is another empty 300-gallon trailer down at your company’s building is there?” Steve asked Jack.

“We had 3 trailers, Steve, why do you ask?” Jack answered.

“I’d really like to get those 300-gallons of stabilized diesel and my tank from the house,” Steve replied. “But we only have 22 empty 5-gallon cans and it would take 60 to empty the tank. I know that I said no manual labor on Sundays, but tomorrow is Sunday, March 6th. It might be a good day to go after the tank and if you have two empty trailers at your shop, we could accomplish it easily in a day.”

“I don’t know that both trailers are there, Steve,” Jack said, “I didn’t really look while we were there the last time. I never had a chance to pick up those 2 pumps that you suggested that I get for water and fuel so I’m not sure how we’ll empty one of the trailers if the trailers both happen to be full.”

“I have a both a water and fuel transfer pump, Jack,” Steve replied. “I was only suggesting the transfer pumps for your trailer home. If both trailers are full, we can use my battery operated pump to empty one of the trailers back into the company’s diesel tank. We’ll just have to unhook one of the deep cycle batteries and take it with us.”

“I think there are several batteries at the shop and if the power is on, we can use a battery charger to power the pump,” Jack suggested.

“That’s even better,” Steve smiled. “We should probably get an early start in the morning.”

Jack had been the one to push to get those downed trees harvested and he was tired. But, he could understand Steve pushing back a little to get his tank. It might have been

easier to just pick up both trailers of fuel, but Steve's tank had connectors for the generator and it sure wasn't worth arguing over. They would end up being in pretty good shape on diesel fuel because unless they started traveling, they'd have 300-gallons for the generator, 55 5-gallon cans full, the 500-gallon tank full and plus another 300-gallon trailer of fuel giving them about 1,375-gallons of diesel. That was enough to run both trucks and the generator, when required, for a year. Even when it was cloudy, the solar panels put out some electricity, just not as much.

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Steve and Jack left shortly after sunup and headed first to the construction company shop. Both of the trailers were empty so they filled one and the empty 22 5-gallon cans. Jack nosed around some in the shop and found a couple of 12-volt powered pumps and a new coil of garden hose. He tossed those on his truck and they headed to Steve and Sandy's house. When they got there, they backed the empty fuel trailer up next to the tank and spend about an hour transferring the fuel. When they were almost done, Steve used a wrench to remove the nuts from the bolts that held the tank in place. They pulled the filled trailer forward, unhooked the other trailer from Jack's truck and backed the truck up to the tank. Steve planned on getting on one end and letting Jack get on the other. Jack grabbed the tank before Steve could move and set it in the bed of his pickup. Steve made a mental note not to piss off Jack.

They hooked the trailer up and headed back to the cabin, this time taking routes to avoid the roadblocks. When they got to the cabin, they used an extra anchor set for the shed and anchored the tank to the ground next to the generator. Then, they connected the plumbing and transferred Steve's fuel back to the tank. The generator could theoretically run for about 600 hours on that one tank of fuel. The filled cans went back in the shed and the two trailers were parked next to the 500-gallon tank. The men took Monday and Tuesday off.

"Man, this place stinks," Steve said to Jack when they entered the shed on morning of Wednesday, March 9th.

"We must have spilled some diesel fuel," Jack said. "Maybe it would be smarter to store those cans of fuel by the tanks and cover them with a tarp."

"Let's move them and then I'll set up the dies for the 5.56x45mm and 7.62x51mm ammo," Steve suggested.

"Ok, but we're going to need to let this place air out for a day before we spend much time in here," Jack suggested.

"We can setup the dies in the house," Steve explained.

It took most of the day to set up the dies for the 7.62x51mm and 5.56x45mm ammo. They had enough of the reloading plates that they also set up dies for the .45 ACP and

the .45 Colt cartridges. I didn't mention the tumbler, but the equipment they had was a complete setup and with the two of them working at it, they could crank out around 500 rounds per hour once they got on a roll.

On Thursday morning, Steve dug out what empty brass he had and they cleaned and reloaded the brass. It wasn't a lot, but it was good practice for them. It had been a while since Steve had done any reloading and Jack had never done it before. Steve had an area that he used as a range and they took some of the reloads out and test fired them. Steve made notes relating how much the point of impact changed with the reloaded ammo and said that they could set up some of the weapons to fire reloads later on if necessary. The deviation from the reloads and the Black Hill ammo ran about ½ MOA and was consistent, meaning in a pinch, they could use 'Kentucky windage'.

Up to this point, about 3 weeks after the attacks, they hadn't found it necessary to fire any of their weapons in self-defense or anger. Around the cabin, Jack preferred to wear his western rig with the single action weapons. He made it a practice, however, to carry the M1911 when they were off-site. He had a standard issue KaBar taped to his ALICE harness. Long hours on the range had made both men very skillful with a variety of weapons. Jack had taken Moira to the range several times and she was familiar and moderately proficient with most of his weapons. Steve had also dragged Sandy to the shooting club range and she could hold her own in any situation. From that point on, they made it a practice to get out on the range once a week to maintain their proficiency, weather permitting. Both women were reasonably proficient with the M16s but much less so with the M1A rifle.

The cabin, in case you haven't guessed, was located in an area north of Rancho Cucamonga, California, just below the Angeles National Forest and not all that far from where the January earthquakes had occurred. This area was extremely rugged and it was an area where the faint of heart or the out-of-condition person were unlikely to be found. And, getting back to the weapons for a moment, not one of Jack's weapons was 'California Legal'. His Mini-14's had Butler Creek folding stocks, aftermarket flashhiders and 30-round PMI magazines. All of the M1A's had the California muzzle break removed and replaced with the Fast Attach mount for the suppressors. And outside of the 10-round magazines the rifles came with all of his magazines were 20-round USGI (CMI) new surplus 20-round (7.62x51mm) and 30-round (5.56x45mm). His AR-15's had the FA mounts for the M4-FA suppressors.

Steve had gone through the Sheriff's Department and picked up 4 new M-16A3's with the M4-FA suppressors and he had purchased a case of the 30-round Teflon coated LeBelle magazines. His 4 M14's were fitted with the Surefire suppressors and he had removed the lock on the selector switch to permit fully automatic fire although using an M14 for spray and pray wasn't his idea of fun; too much recoil and far too much climb. He had a case of flash bangs, a second of CS gas, a third of Mace and finally a fourth of concussive grenades that not even the Department would have approved of.

In terms of usefulness, the handguns were considered to be 7-yard weapons, the shotguns 25-yard weapons, the M16 a solid 300-yard weapon and slightly iffy 400-yard weapon and the M1A's a 800-1,000-yard weapon. Steve's proficiency with the M1A was solid out to about 600-yards and declined rapidly after that. The only difference was that Jack was 80% effective with the M1A out to the 1,000-yard mark. All of the M1A's had been fitted with 3rd generation scope mounts and the Springfield Armory 6-20x50mm Pro-Plex BDC Government Model scope and Harris bipod. All of them, and at \$900 MSRP a pop for the scopes, neither man's investment should be consider small. Then again neither had paid MSRP for anything they had. In Jack's case, most of the time the purchases ran 70% of MSRP. The notable exceptions were the things that would have landed him behind bars and they averaged about 125% of MSRP. Steve enjoyed GSA pricing, whether good or bad.

Each evening they listened to the news and more and more the focus became the local news as opposed to the national news. The widespread looting that had developed a few days into the crisis had dropped off, as there became fewer and fewer things to loot. And the looting was spotty. Some retailers had taken to employing armed guards and their businesses had remained open. Others, like the old man with the sporting goods store, had essentially moved into their business, armed themselves and held would be looters at bay. The principal problem seemed to be the kink in the distribution of goods occasioned by the massive numbers of roadblocks and the intense scrutiny employed by the federal authorities.

Amtrak and bus ridership had increased dramatically because of the continued grounding of the airline industry. There had been a few incidents, usually disgruntled motorists who tried to run roadblocks and had on occasion gotten themselves killed by over anxious guardians of the roadblocks. The Congress, according to CNN and FOX, was re-visiting the question of a National Identity Card based on the Smartcard. As envisioned, the NIC would amount to an internal Passport allowing generally unrestricted travel around the US. It appeared that the legislation would pass in some form before the end of the month. Pundits said it was just a way to round up the illegal aliens and ship them back to their country of origin. Others said that it was a rather unique way to locate a substantial portion of the persons within the country with outstanding arrest warrants. Both sides were probably right. The ACLU, naturally, was threatening to sue if the law was passed in any form.

And, of course during their first few weeks of marriage, Jack learned that Moira was in her prime, not past it. He'd gotten very, very lucky to find her but that luck ran both ways. Big John was a gentle giant and both of them were counting their blessings. Moira also sensed, rather than knew, that her man would stand between her and anyone or anything that would try to cause her harm. He gave her a sense of security that her mother had inadvertently stolen so many years before. Her belief would be tested soon enough because the government efforts to protect the American public were causing problems; distribution problems of the very things Americans required to live. And people who were accustomed to freedom of movement and running to the store at the last minute to get things that were no longer there became angry when someone burst their

bubble. It was an anger fueled by a combination of need and a sense of deprivation. Then on Friday both houses of Congress passed the National Identity Card Measure, A Law to Improve the Internal Security of the United States of America and prepared to send it to Bush for his signature. Bush announced that when the bill hit his desk, he would sign it, with regret.

Big John – Chapter 4 – A New Law

On the following Monday, March 21, 2005, President Bush signed the new law with much fanfare and flourish. That's when it became apparent that there was something a little strange going on. The Department of Homeland Security, according to Bush, had been preparing for such an event and had on hand vast numbers of the cards and the equipment to implement the system immediately, beginning on Monday, March 28, 2005. The new law would go into full force and effect on July 1, 2005 and everyone was urged to immediately report to federal registration centers being set up at the same locations around the US where persons got their driver licenses. Persons without NIC's could be detained until his or her identity was established. Within a year, Bush promised, efforts to coordinate the states driver licensing and the NIC's would be completed and the NIC's would serve as not only a National Identity Card, but also as a state driver's license and possibly even replace credit cards. The ACLU filed their suit a few hours after Bush signed the bill.

No wonder the FBI was in such a mess, they'd been adapting their National Instant Criminal Background Check to use it in processing the NIC's. The penalty for not having a NIC after the July 1 implementation date was a mandatory 30 days in jail during which period the government would confirm your identity and issue you a card all to be accomplished without the benefit of a trial. Refusal to produce your card when requested to do so by a 'competent authority' would result in your arrest and detention, without bail, until a trial could be held. If convicted, you faced up to a year in jail and a \$10,000 fine. On Tuesday, the Federal District Court judge called the assistant US attorney and the ACLU attorney into his office and dismissed the suit for want of standing. That afternoon, the ACLU filed an appeal. On Wednesday afternoon, the Circuit Court dismissed the suit without comment, shocking everyone. On Thursday morning the ACLU filed an appeal with the US Supreme Court. The following Monday, April 4, 2005, the US Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision denied Certiorari.

And, during the week that the ACLU had pursued its appeal, the government had completed distribution of the NIC materials. The news media was aghast, calling the entire process 'kangaroo justice'. The White House declined comment. Meanwhile, up near the Angeles National Forest just north of Rancho Cucamonga, California the 4 adults made ready to get their 'internal passports'. During the past week the news had been filled with reports of attacks on the withdrawing troops in Afghanistan and in the Indian Ocean. The insurgency in Iraqi had slipped up several notches and over 100 US soldiers together with hundreds of Iraqi National Guard had been killed in attacks too numerous to count.

"I'm not so sure this ID card is legal," Steve commented to Jack, "But since I'm a law enforcement officer, I really don't see where I have a choice."

"Why don't you and Sandy drive down the mountain on Tuesday and Moira and I will go on Wednesday," Jack responded. "I happen to agree with you, but not having the ID card would just attract attention and the way things are that's the last thing I want to do."

“What are you going to use for an address?” Steve asked.

“I think we’ll use Moira’s apartment,” Jack said.

“I think maybe Sandy and I will use the house as ours,” Steve agreed.

“Those are our permanent addresses, so it makes sense to me,” Jack said. “I wonder when they’re going to try and start gun registration.”

“What do you mean, Jack? That wasn’t part of that bill,” Steve responded.

“I caught The Factor last night and O’Reilly was claiming that Congress struck a deal between the Republicans and Democrats,” Jack said. “In exchange for going along on the NIC’s the other party agreed to firearms registration.”

“Well, Jack, I don’t have any firearms, do you?” Steve grinned.

“I did until recently and then I sold them all off to private parties,” Jack said. “I didn’t want to bother with registration.”

“Gee, Jack did you report all of those transactions?” Steve kidded.

“You know, Steve, it must have slipped my mind, but I have their names and addresses written down somewhere, if I can find it. They were all related anyway, their last name was Doe and they all lived in Leadfield. What happened to all of your firearms, Steve?”

“I sold them to a Deputy Sheriff from Weed, California,” Steve said. “Can’t remember his name right off the top of my head, but it will come to me.”

“If the two of you are done clowning around, lunch is ready,” Sandy announced. “What’s that you’re wearing Jack?”

“These?” Jack asked. “Why they’re my Crossman air guns.”

“Are they registered?” Sandy kidded. “I don’t want any criminals sitting at my table.”

“As guests threaded their way through a maze of security barriers for the presidential inauguration, they took comfort in knowing that the United States was not alone in turning parts of its capital into a fortress.

“In a world plagued by Islamist suicide bombers, nations such as Britain, France and Israel – which once took pride in their leaders living openly among ordinary people – had begun shutting down access even before September 11.

“But the pace of new street closures, additional roadblocks and building new barriers to the car and truck bombs favored by Osama bin Laden continued to accelerate.

“Within the past year, Israeli officials have reinforced steel barricades protecting the residence of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Jerusalem’s Balfour Street and installed turrets in the compound’s wall with cameras protected by steel grates.

“At the London intersection of Whitehall and Downing streets – about 100 yards from the prime minister’s Georgian-style town house at No. 10 – work had begun on a new barricade consisting of 4-foot-high hydraulically operated steel posts.

“The British system would operate much like the removable bollards blocking Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House.

“Still, other nations had yet to match the restrictions imposed on the US capital.

“For President Bush’s second inauguration, soldiers in full battle gear and toting M-16 rifles equipped with grenade launchers were on hand to protect a restricted, pedestrian-only zone from George Washington University to Capitol Hill and everything in between.

“Understandably, those charged with protecting presidents and prime ministers preferred to err on the side of caution.”

Tuesday morning Steve and Sandy headed down the hill. They told Jack and Moira not to expect them much before supper, who knew how long this process would take? They were back before lunch with the fancy new ID’s. It seems that they were asked for their California Driver’s Licenses and the licenses were swiped through a card reader. About a minute later, the employee had handed them their new National Identity Cards, complete with their pictures. The pictures were the same pictures as on their California Driver’s Licenses. All of their information, including a complete set of fingerprints, their picture, blood type and Social Security Number were coded into the cards, or so they had been told.

“California only collects your thumb print and I don’t believe that they ask your blood type,” Steve observed. “This has to be a pretty efficient computer system to process the information in such a hurry.”

“Steve, the only way they could have all of that information on that card was if they had combined the information from several databases,” Jack proposed. “Either they lied to you or they’ve been preparing for this day for a very long time. Where did they get Sandy’s fingerprints, anyway?”

“Some program the Sheriff’s Department ran,” Steve said. “It was supposed to be part of the Amber Alert Program or something.”

“But Sandy and you don’t have any children,” Moira pointed out.

“Maybe I was wrong about the reason,” Steve said, “But I’m almost sure it was about the Amber Alert.”

“I know my prints are on file because I was in the military,” Jack said. “What about you, Moira?”

“I think they fingerprinted me when I was in the hospital after I had the surgery we talked about,” Moira answered.

“You had surgery?” Sandy asked.

“Appendicitis,” Moira replied.

That didn’t make any sense to Steve. Why would Moira be fingerprinted over an appendix operation? But, he didn’t pry. They had lunch and it was decided that since the process was so quick, maybe Jack and Moira should go down the hill and get their ID cards. Apparently the computer screen that the processing clerk observed as the computer processed the information from the Drivers Licenses showed more than Steve and Sandy had indicated. When the clerk swiped Moira’s license, she got a strange look on her face as she read the screen. There were, of course, police records from long ago that indicated that Moira was a material witness in a murder/suicide investigation.

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Wednesday morning, they were awakened early by the sound of a chainsaw not that far from the cabin. The men got dressed and got weapons before they went to see about the noise.

“Hey,” Steve called, “What do you think you’re doing?”

The man shut down the chainsaw and replied, “What’s it look like I’m doing? I’m cutting down a tree.”

“I’m afraid you need to move up the hill about a mile or so,” Steve explained. “You happen to be on my land and it’s private property.”

“Yeah, well, what are you going to do about it?” the man asked. “Call the Sheriff?”

“I don’t need to friend,” Steve said sliding back his coat to reveal his badge, “The Sheriff is already here.”

“Chit,” the man said eyeing the badge. He picked up his chainsaw, walked to his pickup, tossed the chainsaw in the back and drove off.

“Are you going to let him go, just like that?” Jack asked.

“The tree was dead anyway Jack,” Steve explained. “It was killed by those bark beetles. But I suppose we’d better come up here after breakfast and bring it down and cut it up for more firewood. I don’t want to run the risk of the tree falling and hurting anyone.”

“You know Jack,” Steve said over bacon and eggs, “Law enforcement officers see enough trouble without going looking for it. I could have arrested that guy for trespass and attempted petty theft, but what’s the point? I would have had to haul him down to the Sheriff’s Department and book him and explain the circumstances. Then, the Department would know for sure where I was and I’d rather they not know until this situation clears up a bit.”

“That makes sense,” Jack agreed. “Well are you ready to go play lumberjack?”

The men notched the tree and finished the cut that the amateur logger had started. The tree fell in the general direction of the cabin and they were able to roll the logs down the hill rather than loading them and hauling them. By the end of the day, they had managed to move all of the wood down to the cabin. Jack still had to cut the limbs to length and Steve still needed to split the logs, but there was always Thursday. Sandy had taken a beef roast out of the freezer and they had roast beef, instant mashed potatoes with gravy, canned green beans and homemade bread for supper. After supper, they watched the news.

Several unbelieving souls, 99% men, had attempted to sign up for the new NIC’s only to end up in jail on outstanding warrants for back child support. In Los Angeles, people with outstanding traffic warrants had also been arrested. The announcer said it was growing pains in the new system, then cut to an interview of an ACLU lawyer who insisted that the primary purpose of the law wasn’t to jail the accused but to protect the citizens of the country. And, while he thought that the law fell quite short of its goal, all of these arrests gave the ACLU another basis to appeal the Constitutionality of the law. During the first day of NIC’s were issued, no one had shown up to apply who was considered to be an illegal alien.

In other news the troops were finally out of Afghanistan, but the insurgents in Iraq had stepped up their campaign. It was only Wednesday, Thursday in Iraq, but this week’s death toll was at 76 and climbing. Truckers were complaining about the roadblocks that were holding up shipment of food and essential goods. The restrictions on airline travel had been lifted but no one would be allowed to board a plane unless he or she had a NIC. Subsequently, the airlines had announced that they wouldn’t resume flights for a week to ten days.

Thursday morning after breakfast Jack and Steve finished off the firewood and had it stacked by lunchtime.

“Everything seems fairly calm Jack,” Steve said, “Why don’t we take the empty trailer back and drop it off?”

“I think it might be a better idea to take it back and fill it with unleaded, Steve,” Jack responded. “We can get some of the regular PRI-G stabilizer on the way back and we’ll have some gas we can use to barter.”

“If you think so, I’m agreeable,” Steve replied.

When the men arrived at the construction company’s shop Jack noticed that his boss’s car was there. They went into the office so Jack could visit with his boss, Randy.

“Randy did you find my notes about the trailers and the fuel?” Jack asked.

“I found them, Jack,” Randy said, “I appreciate you leaving the notes. What brings you back here?”

“My friend Steve and I were going to get another 300-gallons of unleaded,” Jack admitted.

“No problem, Jack, we can settle up when this is all over,” Randy replied. “I’m afraid that might be a while, however. The reason I came in was because I got calls from several of our suppliers on the construction jobs and they’re looking at shipment delays of up to 3 months. Those kinds of delays are going to get us way behind schedule and put us into penalty phases on all of the contracts.”

“I can’t believe that the roadblocks would cause that big of a delay,” Steve suggested. “My name is Steve Barranca by the way and I work for the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department.”

“Steve, is it?” Randy said. “It’s more complicated than that. Our suppliers rely on other suppliers to get their basic materials. Some of our suppliers are experiencing delays of 2-3 weeks for their materials and then when they do ship, an additional 2-3 week delivery delay. Top that off with the problems their people are having getting to and from work or not showing up at all and it adds up to delays of up to 3 months. And we’re not talking about an isolated problem, this is widespread.”

“We’ve been out of touch and relying on the TV news,” Jack explained. “If it’s really as bad as that, why hasn’t something been on the news? You know how those news people are Randy. They jump on anything and make a big deal out of it.”

“There really hasn’t been a lot of national news, or hadn’t you noticed?” Randy remarked.

“We noticed that most of the news was local, yes,” Jack replied.

“And the statewide news volume has dropped off too,” Steve added.

“It’s those darned roadblocks,” Randy opined. “The reporters probably can’t get anywhere to cover stories.”

“You know, Randy,” Jack said, “I don’t think so. We haven’t had any trouble avoiding those roadblocks. They only have them on the interstates.”

“Where are you staying, 1,000 Trails?” Randy asked.

“I have a cabin up in the mountains above Rancho Cucamonga,” Steve answered. “My wife Sandy and I and Jack and Moira have been staying there.”

“Had any trouble of any sort?” Randy asked.

“Does a timber rustler count?” Jack laughed.

“A what?” Randy responded.

“A timber rustler,” Steve laughed. “Yesterday, just after dawn we were awakened by a chainsaw. We got dressed and went out and checked. Found some guy on my property trying to cut down one of those dead pine trees.”

“I’ll be danged,” Randy said. “People will steal anything, especially these days. So, where’s he now in the San Bernardino County jail?”

“Nah, I ran him off,” Steve said. “It wasn’t worth the trouble and I’m sort of on leave from the Sheriff’s office. They don’t know where I am and I’d prefer to LEAVE it that way.”

“Oh,” Randy said. “At first I thought you meant you were on vacation.”

“It is sort of a vacation, Randy,” Steve pointed out. “I have about 9 weeks of comp time and 4 weeks of vacation on the books and I’m taking it. I just didn’t tell the Sheriff. I told a buddy at the Sheriff’s Department that I was helping some folks who worked for your company up in the forest.”

“I guess that’s about right,” Randy smiled. “Jack’s one of my best men.”

“Thanks boss,” Jack said, “Does that mean I get a raise?”

“Not exactly,” Randy said taking the notes about the fuel and throwing them in the trash.”

“Close is good,” Jack said.

“You fellas had better get that gas and get out of here,” Randy said. “It will be dark in a couple of hours.”

“If you and your family need somewhere to bug out to,” Steve said drawing a hasty map, “Here’s how you get to my place. We have one more guest room and Jack’s trailer house.”

Jack and Steve filled the fuel trailer and headed back to the cabin.

“Randy is divorced, Steve,” Jack said. “And, I wouldn’t be too surprised if he wasn’t a little behind on his child support. She got him but good. It was a lot like that Jerry Reed song, she got the gold mine and he got the shaft.”

“You and Moira planning to start a family?” Steve asked.

“No can do buddy,” Jack said. “That appendix operation Moira had was a gunshot wound that left her in the same condition as Sandy.”

“Say, was that a murder/suicide about 10 or 12 years ago?” Steve asked. “I thought there was something familiar about her last name, Wolfson. Her mother was trying to shoot her dad and she tried to stop her. That was the very first call I ever went out on. Darn small world, isn’t it? Probably wouldn’t have put it together except for it being my first call and her unusual last name. Well that plus the fact she’s 6’ tall. I thought there was something familiar about Moira, but I couldn’t put my finger on it.”

“Don’t let her know that you know, ok?” Jack asked. “When she’s ready to open up about it, it will be good for her, but it has to be in her own time.”

“Mums the word, buddy,” Steve said.

And Steve didn’t mention it to Sandy because later on it became apparent that she had no idea. Then again that’s some time down the road.

“You know, one of us ought to keep a diary about this little adventure of ours,” Steve said. “I think I’ll use Sandy’s laptop and keep a journal.”

“Might not be a bad idea, Steve,” Jack chuckled. “Then if the Sheriff gets angry at your taking leave, you can sell the book.”

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Friday, April 8th started off uneventful. They had picked up 2 cases of PRI-G at the same store as before on the way home and had added about 19 ounces to the tank of gas. The PRI website claimed, “PRI-G should be mandatory for use in two-stroke gasoline engines. Carbureted engines are especially wasteful of fuel and prone to produce heavy carbon. It is much better to use PRI-G in every tank to prevent carbon build-up

and more complete combustion than it is to run a harsh solvent cleaner through the engine to 'blow-out' carbon. The latter approach presents a risk of loose carbon lodging in an upper ring area, causing engine damage. PRI-G is also great for EFI systems and the latest direct injection systems. So, they decided that it didn't make a lot of difference if they used the small engine stuff or the regular PRI-G.

Around 2pm the day became eventful when a San Bernardino Sheriff's Department patrol car pulled in. Sheriff Gary Penrod got out of the car and came to the door. He knocked and Steve let him in.

"I was wondering if I'd find you here," the Sheriff said.

"Sheriff, I'd like you to meet Jack Douglas and his wife Moira. Jack is the Security Chief for a construction company in LA." Steve said.

"Where are the rest of the people?" the Sheriff asked.

"They're not here now Sheriff," Steve said. "Is there a problem?"

"Not really, no, Steve," the Sheriff replied. "However, the Department can't really justify having a single officer helping one small group. You have 9 weeks of comp time and about 4 weeks of vacation. I'm going to put you on comp time and, if necessary, vacation. That way, there won't be any problems later and the press won't be able to give my office hell."

"Hey, no problem Sheriff," Steve said, "I was just telling Jack's boss Randy yesterday that I had about 3 months' worth of time off coming. I ran into Marty at a roadblock on I-10 maybe a week after those attacks. What are the roadblocks all about and why is our Department handling them?"

"That was only temporary until the Guard could turn out," the Sheriff said. "Say did you run a guy off a couple of days ago?"

"Sure did, Sheriff," Steve replied. "He woke us up with his chainsaw just after dawn. He was on my property cutting down a tree. How did you know about it?"

"He was in the office claiming some madman with an assault rifle and a phony badge ran him off of public property while he was harvesting firewood," the Sheriff explained. "I put 2 and 2 together and figured it was you because the location he described was about right for the area. Besides, I knew you had the M16's and now that I've met your friend Jack, I can see what he was saying about Paul Bunyan. Why didn't you arrest him for trespassing and attempted petty theft?"

"It was a dead tree and I didn't want any trouble, Sheriff," Steve said. "We finished cutting it down and it's stacked outside. Didn't have much choice, the way he ran off. Couldn't leave a half cut tree standing."

"You can plug your phone back in and turn on the cell phone," the Sheriff said. "What did you do with your pager, leave it at the house?"

"Yes sir, turned off in my sock drawer," Steve admitted.

"I brought you two handi talkies and a charger stand and I want you to keep them charged and on at all times," the Sheriff said. "Now, if we have a problem here in the mountains would you and Jack be opposed to making a call if necessary?"

"I'd be glad to help out Sheriff," Jack said.

"Well, I'll probably get my butt in a sling, but I can't have you running around as a civilian doing law enforcement work," the Sheriff said. "Do you carry a firearm in your job, Jack?"

"Yes, Sheriff," Jack said reaching for his wallet to get his CCW.

"Since you're qualified with a firearm, I'm going to make you a Reserve Deputy until this emergency is over," the Sheriff said. "That way, Steve will have backup and you'll be legal. Raise your right hand and repeat after me..."

"Ok, here's the badge, Jack," the Sheriff said. "Now I only want you backing Steve up and you let him take the lead. It will be a whole lot easier explaining to the press that I made you a Reserve Deputy than that I had a civilian backing up a Deputy."

"Thanks Sheriff, I'll mind my P's and Q's," Jack said. "I appreciate your confidence in me."

"You wouldn't have the LA County CCW unless you were responsible, so I don't think I'm running much of a risk. I'll give Lee Baca a call and let him know I gave you the badge. If you have a NIC, I can use that information to generate a proper ID for you."

"We got them on Tuesday Sheriff," Steve explained.

"Ok, a Deputy will be by with an ID and some equipment for you," the Sheriff said. "It will be the usual issue for a Reserve Deputy. What do you usually carry for a sidearm?"

"A .45 ACP," Jack replied.

"We'll issue you a 92FS, but as far as I'm concerned, you can carry the .45 if you're more familiar with it." Sheriff Penrod said. "I have a vest in my trunk that might fit you; it's an XX-Large. And Steve, I brought your paramedic gear in case we get a call in this area."

The vest turned out to be a Point Blank Stealth Protection Integrated Design Equipment Resource also known as S.P.I.D.E.R. It was black and said 'Sheriff' on the front and back and biceps. The plates in the pockets were level IV. The Sheriff also had one for Steve because this wasn't the usual issue.

"You have a rifle, Jack?" Penrod asked.

"I have a lot of rifles Sheriff, all the way up to a White Feather," Jack replied.

"Are you any good with the rifles?" Penrod continued.

"100% at 600-yards and 80% at 1,000-yards," Jack replied.

"Really? Want a job?" Penrod kidded. "Ok I show you as sniper qualified on the paperwork. But, I'll need you to come down to San Bernardino and work with one of our instructors and have him certify your skills. Can you make it on Monday?"

"Sure, I don't see why not," Jack replied.

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Marty came by the next afternoon. He had a pair of handcuffs, loose, the ID in a badge case, a flashlight and a can of pepper spray. He told Jack that he'd have to pick up the Sam Browne belt when he came to San Bernardino, because no one was sure of his size. He'd normally have been measured for a uniform but since this was a temporary deal the Sheriff said not to bother. Marty also had 2 spare batteries for the radios.

"Once a cop, always a cop," Jack said after Marty left.

"What do you mean by that, Jack?" Steve asked.

"I was an MP in the service," Jack replied.

"When the Sheriff finds that out, he'll make the Reserve appointment permanent," Steve said.

"But I don't live in San Bernardino County," Jack protested.

"You don't really live anywhere Jack, Moira and you might as well buy a house near ours, it is just inside the County line," Steve said.

"I thought it was in LA County," Jack said.

"It is a Pomona mailing address, but the house is in San Bernardino County," Steve explained. "Pomona proper is on the LA County side of the line."

Big John – Chapter 5 – Emergency Call

The White House announced today that British Prime Minister Tony Blair offered aid to the United States in the wake of the Valentine's Day attacks, the announcer said. The White House spokesman went on to say that in view of Britain's continuing support of the US in Iraq, President Bush turned down Blair's offer fearing that it would place too great a burden on the 'British People'. Blair has been a staunch supporter of Bush's Iraqi war policy to the point that he risked removal from office. Bush said that 'good friends are hard to come by and with the United Kingdom contributing to the tsunami aid effort, I declined the Prime Minister's offer and suggested that he direct the aid to the victims of the tsunami,' according to the spokesman. In other news, the war in Iraq ended the week with an American death toll higher than any previous week of the war. Senator Ted Kennedy renewed his demands that the US bring the troops home. The White House declined comment.

"Well, I see the US still has one friend left in the world," Steve chuckled.

Just then, the phone rang and Sandy said she'd get it.

"Steve, it's for you," She said, "It's the office."

"Deputy Barranca," Steve answered. "Where? How many? It will take us about 15 minutes. Yes, ok. Let's go Jack. We have a call. Strap on the .45 and get one of your M1A's, plus you'd better get the vest."

"What's up," Jack asked.

"There's been a shooting over on Lytle Creek Road," Steve replied. "They have a chopper inbound but it won't be there any sooner than we will."

"That's the road we turn off of to get to the cabin isn't it?" Jack asked putting on the vest.

"Right, so it won't take but a few minutes to get there," Steve said. "The information is pretty sketchy so I figure we'd better go prepared in case we run into trouble. Apparently there are 2 people down."

It was 2 miles down the fire road to Lytle Creek Road and that took them 7-8 minutes; neither of them was paying any attention to his watch. Steve turned north on the road and pushed the pickup up to about 40mph. He radioed the chopper and it was 6-8 minutes out. As Steve rounded the curve they called the Dipper, both men saw a car with its head off the road to the right and the body of a man lying next to the open driver's door. Steve slowed down so they didn't run into an ambush, but there was no one around. He pulled the vehicle up, grabbed his paramedic bags and headed for the man on the ground. Jack got out and surveyed the area with a pair of Steve's night vision

binoculars. When Jack was relatively sure that there was no one around, he put his rifle in the rear window rifle rack and went to help Steve.

“What do you have?” Jack asked.

“Check the other person in the car,” Steve said, “This guy is alive but bleeding badly. I haven’t had time to check the other person.”

Jack looked and announced, “It wouldn’t have made any difference Steve, this one took a round through the head. She’s dead.”

“Did you see anyone?” Steve asked.

“No,” Jack replied. “Here comes the chopper.”

“Here, hold this IV,” Steve said handing Jack an IV bag, “I’ve got to establish a second IV and do a massive fluid replacement.”

Jack moved so he was between where the chopper landed and where Steve was working on the man on the ground. Two men jumped out of the chopper with a litter and waited until Steve finished establishing the second IV. Steve plugged the guy into a bag of Ringer’s and they loaded him into the litter and onto the chopper. The chopper took off hell bent for leather and Steven went to check on the woman. Jack was right; she’d apparently died instantly. Right about then the duty Sergeant pulled in and walked over to them.”

“I have one dead and one dying Sergeant,” Steve announced. “The guy in the chopper has probably lost too much blood. I don’t believe you know Jack Douglas. Jack, Sergeant Rowland.”

“Sergeant,” Jack said extending his hand.

“Good to meet you Jack,” Rowland said taking his hand, “They weren’t lying, you’re a big one. Any sign of who did it?”

“I scoped the area with the night vision binoculars Sergeant,” Jack said, “But I didn’t see anyone.”

“I understand you’re a Security Chief for a company in LA?” Rowland asked.

“Right,” Jack said.

“Any police experience?” Rowland inquired.

“I was an MP in the Army, if that counts,” Jack replied softly.

"Hell yes, boy, that counts. So you're one of us and not just a 6' 6 civilian, huh?" Rowland hooted.

"I guess I'm both, Sergeant," Jack chuckled, "I'm 6' 6 and a civilian, but I do have some police experience."

"Wait until the Sheriff hears," Rowland said. "He'll want to make you a full time Deputy."

"I'd have to pass on that Sergeant," Jack said. "But I might consider moving to San Bernardino County so I could remain a Reserve Deputy."

"Where do you live now?" Rowland asked.

"My wife and I are staying with Steve and Sandy at the cabin," Jack said, "But we were living in my wife's apartment. We got married the Saturday before Valentine's Day in Las Vegas."

"They give you a flashlight?" Rowland asked.

"Got it right here," Jack replied, "I think maybe the shots came from over there." Jack pointed his light to a small rise about 60-70 yards away.

"Let's go look," Rowland suggested.

When they arrived, Steve shined his light on two cartridge casings.

"Well, two cartridge casings and two bullet holes means the guy could have been using a semi-automatic rifle," Jack said, "But you'll have a better idea once they process the cases and the bullets."

"What did you do in the military?" Rowland asked.

"I was an MP, Sergeant, but I could have been in CID if I had been willing to extend my enlistment," Jack said. "I wasn't willing to stay the additional 2 years so I didn't go to the Special Agents Course. But I frequently worked with CID Special Agents doing mostly grunt work."

"What makes you think it was a semi-auto?" Rowland asked.

"The 7.62x51mm caliber and 2 casings suggest a M1A or maybe a Browning. Or, it could have been a Remington 7400, assuming it was an American rifle," Jack replied.

"Get out of here," Rowland said.

“Just my opinion,” Jack said, “I could be wrong. The BAR has 1 twist in 12”, but so do some of the M1A’s. The 7400 has 1 twist in 10” but so do some of the M1A’s. If the twist on the bullets is 1 twist in 11” it’s probably an M1A.”

“I knew that,” Steve said. “At least I knew that about the M1A’s, Sergeant.”

“Excuse me while I catch the radio,” Rowland said.

“Steve,” he said when he returned, “The guy was DOA, too much blood loss. I put in a call to the detectives.”

“I guess you don’t need us anymore, Sergeant, we’ll go back to my place and write up our reports,” Steve said picking up his things.

“Yeah, sure, I’ll send Marty out later to pick them up,” Rowland said. “Will you be at your cabin if the detectives have any questions?”

“Yes,” Steve said and walked back to the pickup.

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“What kind of call was that honey?” Sandy asked Steve when they got home.

“Shooting. One dead at the scene and one DOA,” Steve replied. “It had to be an ambush because the shooter used a 7.62x51mm and Jack thinks it was probably a semi auto.”

“I said it could be a semi-auto, Steve,” Jack pointed out.

“For what it’s worth, I agree with your analysis of the scene,” Steve said. “Let me get the report forms and I’ll show you how to fill them out, Deputy Douglas.”

“Let me give it a try and if I need help, I’ll ask,” Jack suggested.

The forms weren’t that much different from the military forms from back in the 1970’s so Jack managed to get the form filled out without any help. When he finished, it gave it to Steve to look over and after reading it, Steve told him to sign, date and note the time. Steve had extra forms to fill out because he’d rendered medical assistance at the scene. It was after midnight when he finished. Jack watched the 11:00 news on KCBS, channel 2, Los Angeles.

More people had been arrested when they’d tried to get the NIC’s and more people had been killed in Iraq. There had been another one of those high-speed car chases that had lasted until the fleeing driver had run out of gas. He’d refused to get out of his car and they finally shot him, although not fatally. There had been a bomb threat at Los Angeles International Airport by someone authorities assumed was a disgruntled passen-

ger or Wanttabe passenger. The airlines still weren't running because not enough people had NIC's. A Pacific storm front was moving in which was a little surprising considering how far into spring they were; at least that's what Byron Miranda said. Jack turned the TV off and went to bed where Moira was already sound asleep.

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It was half past seven when Jack woke in the morning. He felt as if he'd been pulled through a knothole backward. It had been chilly the night before even though it was April. He figured that was because they were in the mountains. The bathroom was free so he showered and shaved and shined the fangs. He needed a haircut in the worst way. Usually, he got a haircut about once every 8-10 days and wore his hair short. He parted it and that helped on the top but the sides were still shaggy. He stopped to get his bearings and realized that today was Sunday, the shooting had been Saturday night, and he had to go to San Bernardino to work with the instructor on Monday. The barber-shops were closed Sundays and Mondays so the haircut would have to wait until Tuesday.

"Good morning," Jack said sitting down to the table.

"Growing your hair out?" Steve asked.

"Nope. But I parted it until I can get to a barbershop on Tuesday," Jack replied.

"Sandy cuts my hair and she can do yours any time you want," Steve suggested.

"I guess I haven't been paying attention," Jack admitted, "I was wondering why you didn't need a haircut."

"Eat your breakfast and then I'll cut your hair," Sandy offered. "Do you want 2 eggs or 3?"

"I'll take 3 scoops, Sandy," Jack replied.

The eggs were powdered eggs and came out scrambled every time. A scoop was probably equal to 2 or 3 eggs so that meant that he was eating about a 6 to 9 eggs had they been fresh. Sandy had hot biscuits and must have thawed out a package of hash browns from the freezer. Jack ate his fill and drank some coffee while Sandy washed the dishes. When she was through, she got her clippers and started on his hair. Moira came out just as Sandy was finishing up and got herself a cup of coffee. Most mornings since they'd been married, Moira was up at the same time as he got up. For some reason, she'd slept in this morning, but she looked a little less tired than she'd been looking recently.

After she had a few swallows of coffee, Moira got up and served herself some eggs, hash browns and biscuits. She took the pot and refilled everyone's cups and Steve and

Jack got up and turned to CNN to find out who killed whom overnight other than the man and woman on Lytle Creek Road. They hadn't stuck around long enough to find out who the people were and Marty hadn't been by yet to pick up their reports. Thus it came as quite a shock when they learned that the two people killed the night before were undercover federal agents. They hadn't been armed, as far as they'd seen, but apparently the people had gotten too close to someone or something and that had gotten them killed.

Jack got out a road atlas and looked to see what could possibly be up Lytle Creek Road that could result in 2 people being killed. Lytle Creek Road butted into Lone Pine Canyon Road and it either took you to Highway 138 and on to I-15 at the base of Cajon Pass or up towards Wrightwood on Highway 2. Highway 2 either took you to Phelan and the 138 Junction or went northwest for a ways and the Junction road N4 that went to Valyermo or continued on as Highway 2 through the Angeles National Forest. From Valyermo you could either go north to Lake Los Angeles or northwest to Palmdale. There sure wasn't anything or anyone in Palmdale or Lake Los Angeles to interest anyone except maybe Plant 42 in Palmdale. The only thing that Jack could conclude was that the agents had been specifically lured to the spot where they'd been killed.

Since Marty hadn't picked up their reports yet, Jack got a form from Steve and prepared an addendum to his report, documenting his findings and suspicions. He'd no more than finished up and signed, dated and entered the time on the addendum than Marty showed up to pick up the reports and give Steve replacement supplies for what he'd used the night before. Marty was in a hurry so Jack didn't have time to mention the contents of his addendum and after Marty left, it slipped his mind and he forgot to mention it to his new 'partner'.

Moira finished her breakfast, washed her dishes and took a shower. After she got dressed, she joined him on the couch. About that time it dawned on Steve that Jack had added something to his report and he asked Jack to fill him in. Jack gave him the short version and mentioned his suspicion that those federal agents had been specifically lured to that spot and killed. What Jack didn't know, and couldn't know, was that when they arrived on the scene, the killer had still been there and had seen both of them. That killer was another government employee whose job was to 'tie up loose ends', usually overseas but on occasion at home although the charter of the agency specifically prohibited the agency from operating on American soil. There is only one agency that the description fits.

"Long ago trashing its official charter, the CIA operates corporations, major media, and a secret army of operatives. Since the 1960s the Agency has been waging a sinister war inside America, hidden from public view. Behind the scenes, former military and CIA fanatics conduct covert operations across the nation. They call themselves The Company. They've formed a secret government. They're liquidating citizens. Spying on American cities. Running TV networks. And worse.

“Only problem is Lance Page. They taught him everything and now he tells the tale. From the assassinations of the 1960s to today’s Z-time children’s programming, it’s all here. You see the warning signs. You see the propaganda. The ultra-right secret government is taking over. They’ve infiltrated the media. Assassinated the opposition. Been elected to the highest offices. As one spook said, ‘You wouldn’t believe what’s going on.’

“Are you ready to see like the CIA? Ready to meet The Company? Get ready for ‘CIA Domestic Operations!’”

Had Jack or Steve known that killer had seen them they’d have probably worn their guns to bed. But, what you don’t know can’t hurt you, right? Maybe that was a good general rule but in this instance it was flat wrong. It didn’t matter for the moment because the killer didn’t have instructions to kill them and he was fairly certain neither of the men had seen his face or even knew he’d been there. Then, that Sergeant had shown up and he’d been forced to egress the area quickly and had even forgotten to pick up the 2 cartridge casings. When he’d realized that, the M21 had ended up on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. That was a crying shame, but the weapon belonged to his employer, the CIA.

Sandy and Moira were sitting at the table engaged in ‘girl talk’ when Sandy asked Moira when they could expect to hear the patter of little feet. Jack overheard the question and realized that Steve hadn’t told Sandy what he’d figured out. Moira blanched and then in a quiet voice explained all about the death of her parents and what had happened to her. The scar on her abdomen wasn’t an appendix operation scar at all, but a carefully disguised bullet entry wound that had resulted in a partial hysterectomy. Sandy let Moira have her cry and then explained to her that she’d been injured in a riding accident, as a teenager, and had been forced to have a partial hysterectomy too.

“You don’t remember me do you Moira?” Steve asked.

“No, have we met before?” Moira asked.

“I was one of the paramedics who attended to you the day you got shot. About the only way I realized it was that Jack mentioned you couldn’t have children and I remembered where I’d heard the name,” Steve explained.

“You could have told me Steve,” Sandy said.

“Sorry, honey, but I gave Jack my word not to say anything to anyone about what I’d figured out,” Steve quickly explained. “And Moira, Jack didn’t tell me why you couldn’t have children, I pretty much figured that out on my own.”

Catharsis: discharge of pent-up emotions so as to result in the alleviation of symptoms or the permanent relief of the condition. (In plain English, Moira revealing her story to

persons other than persons with whom she had a familial relationship gotten rid of a lot of the pain.)

Moreover, Steve's comments reaffirmed Moira's trust in her new husband and Jack knew he had a friend he could trust with most anything. Steve told Jack that he was going with him tomorrow and talk with Sheriff Penrod about that addendum and Jack's suspicions. Jack asked Steve if he should take his Super Match rifle, his M21 or his M25 White Feather. Steve suggested that he take all three. Steve went on to say that since he was now a law enforcement officer, he probably ought to take the FA762S he had for the Super Match and M21 rifles. Jack had a suppressor for the M25, but he'd never had the heart to install it, preferring to keep the rifle in its original state. The M25 was sighted in, but it was just as it came from the factory.

The weapons were loaded into their hard shell cases and the two men left for San Bernardino. When they arrived at the Sheriff's Department, both men were ushered into the Sheriff's office.

"I understand that you were an MP in the Army," Penrod said to Jack.

"That's right Sheriff Penrod," Jack acknowledged. "I did boot camp, AIT and then went to the Military Police School. I was an MP during my last 3 years."

"What was your discharge rank?" Penrod asked.

"E-5," Jack replied. "I think they were trying to bribe me to reenlist."

"I also understand that you almost went to school to become a CID agent but didn't because you would have had to extend your enlistment," Penrod smiled.

"I guess I know whom you've been talking to Sheriff," Jack shook his head.

"Here's the deal Jack," Penrod explained. "After you work with the instructor today, we'll either firm up the sniper rating or remove it from the record. Somehow I have the feeling we're going to end up confirming it. Now, after all of this trouble is over and you and that new wife of yours decide where you want to live, the temporary position as a Reserve Deputy could turn into a permanent offer if you decide to live in San Bernardino County. Lee Baca's office had pulled your military file when you applied for the CCW in LA County some years ago. His office faxed me a copy and your record was pretty impressive for a first hitch soldier. A couple of those cases were fairly high profile."

"Sheriff, I mostly did the grunt work on those 2 cases," Jack said. "It was a CID show all of the way."

"Maybe, but you impressed somebody," Penrod replied. "There was a recommendation in your file and you were virtually assured of a slot in the Special Agents School, had you applied. What did you bring to shoot today?"

“I wasn’t sure what to bring, so I brought my Super Match rifle, the M21 and the M25 White Feather,” Jack replied. “Uh, Sheriff Penrod, the Super Match and M21 are equipped with suppressors and I have 20-round magazines for the rifles.”

“I guess it’s a good thing I gave you that badge,” Penrod said. “Any other surprises?”

“Well, I don’t have any fully automatic weapons, but I do have the M4-FA suppressors on both of my AR-15’s,” Jack admitted. “And there’s my Ruger Mark-II with the integral suppressor.”

“Really?” Penrod said. “I see now why Steve and you became friends so fast. Steve has suppressors for most of his rifles and those M16A3’s are probably in factory condition. Tell me Steve, did you take the locks off the M14’s?”

“I did, but they’re a bitch to shoot on full auto Sheriff,” Steve admitted.

“Jack you’d better get with that instructor, Steve you hang around a minute,” Penrod said.

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The instructor had Jack start with the Super Match and he fired some refresher rounds with the rifle to confirm his zero. Then, he shot the regulation course of fire the Department used to qualify their snipers and qualified with that rifle. Over the period of 3 hours, it became a little easier as the nervousness wore off and Jack progressed to the ‘better’ rifles. By the end of that time, he was a certified sniper for the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department. The instructor recommended that he install the suppressor on the White Feather, too. In an urban environment the Department preferred not to upset a lot of people with gunfire and their SOP was suppressed rifles. Jack demurred, saying that the White Feather was essentially a collector’s item only and that the M21 was just as accurate. Jack had also qualified with his .45 ACP M1911A1.

“What did the Sheriff want?” Jack asked Steve when they were headed back to the cabin.

“He wanted me to work on you to get you to permanently locate in San Bernardino County,” Steve replied. “I mentioned that I’d talked to you about getting a home in the same neighborhood where Sandy and I live. He also said that you’d better think long and hard about remaining a Reserve Deputy in view of the hardware you have. You’re just lucky he was impressed as he was with you. He still could have busted you for those weapons because you had them before you became a LEO. And, everything is probably off the books, right?”

“True,” Jack admitted.

“Anyway we’re going to be reassigned to the Twin Peaks Station when I get back on duty,” Steve continued. “Twin Peaks continues to be among the busiest of county operations covering the unincorporated areas of the San Bernardino Mountains. The station is responsible for the patrol operations covering an area of approximately 340 square miles from Lake Silverwood to Snow Valley. The major communities include Crestline, Lake Arrowhead, and Running Springs. As a well-known resort area the population can range from 35,000 during the week to over 85,000 during the weekends.”

Nothing was said about the addendum to Jack’s report. It was close to suppertime when Steve and Jack got home. They washed up, changed into something more comfortable and sat down to watch the TV news. Jack was ‘playing’ with his new Sam Browne rig and had switched the .45 holster they’d given him for the holster for the 92FS. Jack didn’t know if the gear was issue gear or something he’d be billed for.

“Steve, does the Department let you carry a 10mm-auto?” Jack asked.

“With permission from the Sheriff, yes, why?” Steve asked.

“I also have a Glock 20,” Jack said. “Plus I have 5 of the 15-round magazines.”

“I’ll call down to San Bernardino tomorrow and get you permission and see about setting up a qualifying session,” Steve suggested.

Jack knew the qualification course would be a ‘snap’ so he removed the .45 holster from the Sam Brown belt and put on the Bianchi holster for the Glock. He also had to use his own magazine cases, but they matched the belt and holster, fortunately, so no one would know the equipment hadn’t been originally issued that way. They hadn’t really had a chance to pay much attention to the news when Moira and Sandy called them for supper. Supper this evening consisted of ‘swissed’ thick cut round steak, instant potatoes, gravy and more of the canned green beans plus more of the homemade bread the gals must have baked while they were gone.

“How did it go today?” Moira asked.

“I qualified as a sniper with all 3 of my rifles. I also qualified with the M1911A1,” Jack related. “I think I’ll switch from the .45 and re-qualify with my Glock 20 10mm pistol if Steve can get permission from Sheriff Penrod for me to carry the Glock. I’m going to put the White Feather back in the case and restrict myself to the Super Match rifle or the M21. I really don’t want to put the suppressor on the M25.”

“That’s great,” Moira replied. “Jack, have you given any thought to where we’re going to live when things get back to normal?”

“Steve has been pressing a little to get us to move into the housing tract where Sandy and he live,” Jack explained.

"I didn't press, Jack, I just made a suggestion," Steve added.

"I'd be in favor of it," Moira said. "The store has an opening in the store in Pomona and it would be a small promotion for me. Sandy said there are two houses on the market in their neighborhood."

"If we can find a house we like, it's ok with me," Jack replied.

Moira's squeal of delight informed Jack he'd made a wise decision. They finished up supper and while Sandy and Moira whipped through the dishes, Steve and Jack tried to catch the news they'd missed earlier. There was nothing more on the news about the shooting on Lytle Creek Road.

The story of the day, to the men, seemed to be some small earthquake swarms around the state. The quakes were tiny, barely 1.0 on the Richter scale, but there were several swarms up and down the state. Earthquakes with magnitude of about 2.0 or less are usually called micro earthquakes; they are not commonly felt by people and are generally recorded only on local seismographs. Earthquake swarms are generally defined as clusters of earthquakes closely spaced in time and area that do not have a defined main shock. Defining the length of time of an earthquake swarm is often difficult and there are many scientific papers that discuss commonly used methods. Swarms are not uncommon on volcanoes and also happen in regions without volcanic activity, e.g., January 2004 near Livermore, California. The information on the swarms wasn't considered significant and most stations didn't carry the story. Those that did used it as filler for some otherwise dead airtime. California had a lot of earthquakes.

"One of these days, this whole flipping state is going to fall off into the ocean," Jack kidded.

"That'll never happen Jack, but LA could get to San Francisco a few years earlier than planned," Steve replied.

"If they ever get a quake up in Seattle, they'll be in for trouble," Jack pointed out. "The whole darned downtown is built on fill."

"The USGS put a monitoring station in at Long Valley Caldera back in 1982," Steve pointed out. "But they still can't predict earthquakes and I met Lucy Jones one time. She's that big shot Professor with the USGS."

"Really?" Jack responded.

"She told the class it was mostly guesswork, but that someday they hoped to find a way to predict the quakes," Steve related.

Big John – Chapter 6 – House Hunt

On Tuesday, April 12th, Steve called the Sheriff and after some discussion, got the Sheriff to approve Jack carrying the 10mm Glock. The Sheriff appeared, according to Steve, to be reluctant but had caved in when Steve had pointed out that the Glock would be a normal sized weapon for Paul Bunyan. Steve had made an appointment with the same instructor for Jack to qualify with the Glock at 13:00. They got cleaned up and had an early lunch and headed down to San Bernardino. Jack easily qualified with the Glock. He'd have carried it for work at the construction company but Randy had told him to stick with the .45. After they finished, Steve suggested that they swing by the house just to make certain everything was all right.

Steve gave the house a quick run through and decided that everything was ok, but turned off the water heater because he said there was no sense in wasting gas. The house was equipped with one of those earthquake shutoff valves. He also turned off the water but left the electricity on to power the furnace. He had to leave the gas on because of the furnace, but it was set at 55. There wasn't much chance of pipes freezing in Pomona, California in the month of April, however. Then Steve pointed out the 2 houses that Sandy had mentioned to Moira. One was 2 doors down and had a basement. The floor plan was the mirror image of their home, according to Steve. The other home was slightly larger but didn't have a basement. Steve and Sandy had been friends with the folks who had owned the mirror image home with the basement and he told Jack that his friend had put in an earthquake gas valve the same time they did.

Jack told Steve that he liked the looks of the house with the basement and it was nicely landscaped. Steve told Jack the home was in excellent condition and well cared for. His friend, he said, had taken a job at the Lockheed Skunk Works and had moved to Palmdale in January.

"I wouldn't want to live in Palmdale," Jack said. "That town sits right on the San Andreas Fault."

"Jack, living in southern California, you can't get away from the faults," Steve pointed out. "All you can do is buy earthquake insurance and hope it happens somewhere else. We have the Sierra Madre Fault, you know. The Cucamonga fault zone is part of the same fault system, marking the southern boundary of the San Gabriel Mountains, as the Sierra Madre fault zone. Sometimes it is included as part of the Sierra Madre fault zone, as is the San Fernando fault zone far to the west; the USGS refers to each as separate fault zones, as it is not clear that a rupture may progress from one to another. Perhaps the best way to rectify the difference in nomenclature would be to refer to the Cucamonga fault zone, Sierra Madre fault zone, and the San Fernando fault zone as the Sierra Madre fault system."

"Lucy Jones?" Jack asked.

“Yeah, great class,” Steve said. “Lots of information. Say I forgot to mention, the LA County Sheriff upgraded your CCW to 24/7, unrestricted, since you’re a Reserve Deputy.”

When they got back to the cabin, Jack immediately recognized Randy’s SUV sitting there. The vehicle was one of those new Jeep Liberty diesels. The 2.8-liter CRD was rated at an estimated 160 horsepower (120 kW) at 3800 rpm and with 295 lb.-ft. (400 N.m.) at 1800 rpm, providing class-leading torque and towing capability. The vehicle featured functional rock rails, four skid plates, and P235/70R16 all-terrain tires with wider, more aggressive treads, available GPS DVD-based navigation radio and “diamond plate-inspired” seat fabric and had the optional overhead light bar.

“Hi, Randy, what brings you here?” Jack asked.

“I’m sort of lying low,” Randy explained. “Steve, does that offer of your spare bedroom still hold? I got another trailer and filled it with 500-gallons of stabilized diesel.”

“What’s going on Randy, problems with the ex?” Jack asked.

“More or less,” Randy said. “I got caught up on the child support and alimony and got my NIC. Then she turns around and files a suit to raise the alimony. I can’t be sued if I can’t be served and she’d never know to tell them to look here. Did Jack tell you about my ex-wife, Steve?”

“Only that she got the gold mine and you got the shaft,” Steve smiled.

“Jack, I’m thinking about just letting her take the business,” Randy said. “What with the supply problems, if she got the business, she’d end up being the one getting screwed. I’m afraid if I do that, you’ll be out of a job.”

“Do whatever you think is best for you Randy and don’t worry about me,” Jack replied. “The San Bernardino County Sheriff might end up being somewhere that I could get a job. We stopped by Steve and Sandy’s home today and I saw a house for sale that I liked, so I may move to Pomona anyway.”

Moira and Sandy overheard and they exchanged a hi-five. Moira was grinning from ear to ear and Sandy whispered that there was that house 2 doors down that was the mirror image of theirs. Steve and Jack talked to Randy for a while after they put his things in the 3rd bedroom and Randy went out and got in his Jeep and took off.

“Where’s he going?” Moira asked.

“He’s going to his wife’s lawyer’s office and get served,” Jack explained. “After we visited he said screw it and screw her, let her finish the contracts. He said he was just going to sign over all the shares of the corporation to her and be done with it. We’ll have to run down to the shop tomorrow so I can get my gear.”

“So, you’re out of a job?” Moira asked.

“Only until I can talk to the Sheriff,” Jack replied. “And if he won’t hire me, I know 2 or 3 people who will. Once I get a new employer, we’ll put an offer on the house 2 doors down from Steve and Sandy, if you approve.”

“You saw the house?” Moira asked.

“Only from the outside, Moira,” Jack said. “Do you remember the house with the brick veneer?”

“I loved the looks of that house,” she replied.

“Well, I’ve got the cash from my two bank accounts and the balance of my money market account so I think we can pay their asking price,” he explained. “Plus I still have most of the money I won in Vegas so we’ll have a home that’s more paid for than not. We should be able to get payments small enough that we can pay the thing off in 10 or 15 years.”

“You’ll get a lower interest rate with a shorter term loan,” Steve said. “And if you double your payments, you can pay off a 30 year loan in about 7 years. I’d guess that in 3-4 years your home would be paid for if you double those payments.”

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Randy was back in time for supper and he told Jack that the lawyer gave them 24-hours to remove any ‘personal property’ from the office and shop. He also told the men he knew where he could get two worn out trucks that each had 3,000-gallon tanks. So, when they went down the mountain tomorrow, they could pick up the trucks and empty out as much of the fuel from the tanks as they could haul. He said there wasn’t much more than 3,500-gallons in either tank anyway, so they’d have the majority of the fuel. They would also fill up a pickup with some of the firm’s power tools and the portable generators and anything else they could carry. Steve said they could pull the 6’x12’ trailer and Randy’s eyes lit up.

“We’ll see who ends up with the gold mine and who gets the shaft,” Randy chuckled.

Wednesday, April 13th was extremely busy. First they hooked the trailer to Jack’s long bed pickup and went after the 2, mostly worn out, delivery trucks. They nursed them down to the shop and Jack cleaned out his desk while Steve filled the tankers and Randy raided the shop. Jack looked in Randy’s office and it had already been cleaned out so he figured that Randy had made his decision before he’d shown up at the cabin. He put his things in the pickup and helped Randy gather ‘personal belongings’ from the shop. There were a couple of new Skil saws still in the boxes and dozens of smaller items you’d usually find in the shop of a construction company. By the time they finished

gathering the 'personal items' the pickup and trailer were filled to almost overflowing and Steve had the tankers filled. There was also a knock down shed that they sometime used on jobs included in the haul so they'd have someplace to store the 'personal belongings' when they got back to the cabin.

The fuel delivery trucks had come cheap. The brakes were about worn out, the tranny's shot and the engines barely ran. It had been a miracle that they made it to the shop and up the mountain. One of them died just after they parked it and it was probably dead for good. Randy had bought them from a guy he knew who had been planning on junking the 2 old trucks. It didn't take long to assemble the knock down shed and it held everything they removed from the business. As a closely held corporation that had started out as a proprietorship, the records on what belonged to whom were in a bit of disarray anyway. The ex-wife's attorney had brought her in the previous afternoon and they'd given Randy a full release of liability in exchange for full ownership of the company. Randy had left about enough money in the checking account to cover a week's payroll and had even made arrangements with Bank of America for the ex to be the new signatory on the account. Nice guy Randy! Randy told them he'd closed his apartment and was pulling up stakes, headed to Ohio.

The children weren't even Randy's. They were from his ex-wife's first marriage. She'd needed him until he'd gone ahead and adopted them; the ex-husband wasn't paying his child support, and about a year later filed for divorce. The court was very understanding, but told him the children were his responsibility. Part of the release from liability was a release from child support that the attorney assured him the court would approve under the circumstances. Randy was headed to Ohio, all right. He'd rented an efficiency apartment in Riverside on Ohio Street.

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After dinner that evening they all sat down to watch the news. There was Lucy Jones on channel 4 talking about the earthquake swarms. The USGS was watching the swarms but according to Mrs. Jones, they could or could not be indicative of problems in the future. Earthquake swarms were uncommon enough, she said, to merit additional attention, but they weren't necessarily indicative of anything specific. Dr. Jones retained her maiden name when she married a fellow Seismologist.

The White House reported that the issuance of NIC's was moving far more smoothly than had been initially anticipated and in some areas of the country they were nearing full compliance. Other areas of the country, especially the more rural areas, weren't doing nearly so well and concern was expressed that some Americans just didn't know what was good for them. The announcer proudly held up his new NIC. Liberal! Hey, it was Paul Moyer and Paul Moyer called all guns either pistols or automatic weapons. The station was KNBC, channel 4, Los Angeles.

On Thursday, April 14th, Steve, Jack and Randy made a trip to San Bernardino to see Sheriff Penrod. The Sheriff said that he'd see about working Jack in on the SWAT team

and that Jack should go ahead and buy uniforms, especially in light of Jack's indication that they were making an offer on a house 2 doors down from Steve and Sandy. They went by the store and got Jack measured for his new uniforms and the three men returned to the cabin and had lunch. That afternoon, Jack took his gold Eagles to a dealer and sold them for \$850 an ounce, a clear profit of \$425, per coin. Next, they went to the realtor and made an offer on the house. The realtor assured them that the offer would be accepted because they were offering the asking price and inquired how they intended to pay for the home.

"Do you take cash?" Jack asked.

"Yeah right, you have a briefcase full of cash," the realtor had joked.

"No, I have 2 briefcases full of cash," Jack replied and showed him.

The realtor got on the phone and called the couple that had the house on the market. He told them that he had a cash purchaser for their home at the asking price. Then he explained that he wasn't talking about a check, but real cash, bundles of \$100 bills. The couple was in the office about 1 hour and 15 minutes later and accepted the offer. The realtor called an escrow company and explained the circumstances. The escrow company quickly figured the fees and Jack and Moira paid cash for their new home, \$250,000 plus closing costs. The realtor told them it would take a couple weeks for the paperwork, but he gave them the keys to their new home. They drove by and went inside and it was even nicer than Steve and Sandy's if that were possible.

On Friday, April 15th and Saturday, April 16th, they used a rental truck to move everything from Moira's apartment to the new home after making sure with the realtor that it would be no problem. Jack also went through his trailer home and loaded all of his things into the back of the pickup and they ended up at the new house. After they returned the rental truck, Jack and Moira decided to spend one night in their new home and christen it properly. The next day, Sunday, April 17th, they went to a Best Buy and bought new appliances for the kitchen including a refrigerator and stove plus a washer and dryer for the laundry room. They also went to a furniture store and picked up a new bedroom suite that included a California King-Sized mattress and box springs. A California King measures 72" wide by 84" long, which was just about right for a man who stood 78" tall. The things from the Store were to be delivered on Friday, April 22nd.

"So did you get appliances for the home?" Steve asked.

"Yes, we got a new bedroom suite, refrigerator, stove, washer and dryer," Moira beamed.

"Do you have any money left Jack?" Steve asked.

"Why, do you have something that you want to sell me?" Jack chuckled. "I have about \$35,000 left so basically I'm in exactly the same financial condition I was before we got

married except that thanks to that Vegas jackpot, Moira and I now had a new home fully paid for and fully furnished. I didn't even have to get into my money market account, but that's included in the total. We still need to add a few things to the house, but we're essentially set."

"What kinds of things?" Steve asked.

"I'd like to get the basement fixed up like yours and put in a standby residential generator for starters," Jack replied. "And, I want to get a good gun safe for all of my weapons. I might get a Ham license and put in one of those radios like you have, too. What kind is it anyway?"

"Jack, it's a Kenwood TS-2000X," Steve replied.

"Is it expensive?" Jack asked.

"Yes, but you have enough money to pay for one and all of the antennas," Steve chuckled. "Equipped like mine with all of the same antennas, will run under 3 grand. The standby generator will set you back more than the radios."

Once the escrow closes on the house, I would like to move down there," Jack said.

"Well, I don't see any reason we have to stay here," Steve replied. "It appears that there won't be any more terrorist attacks and I really should get back to work. I've used up my 9 weeks of comp time and am working on my first week of my vacation. I'd like to keep a little vacation in reserve. Randy, why don't you just stay here and keep an eye on the place for Sandy and me?"

"I wouldn't want to impose, Steve," Randy said.

"Actually, Randy, you'd be doing me a favor," Steve said. "There is a lot of fuel and stuff now that we didn't have 9 weeks ago. I'm going to need to figure out how to make this place more secure."

"I have a couple of ideas about that if you wouldn't mind," Randy replied. "I could get a friend in with an excavator to dig some holes and we could bury the tanks. He has a crane and we could probably lift the 3,000-gallon tanks off those trucks and just bury the tanks together with the 500-gallon diesel tank you have. I can get a pole shed erected and park the 3 300-gallon and the 500-gallon trailers inside of it."

"It's fine with me, Randy," Steve said. "I wouldn't mind having all of those tanks buried. This place is getting a little crowded with everything sitting around."

On Monday, April 18th, they started hauling the food and everything else back to Pomona. It only took that one day and they stayed in Pomona that night. Randy went to Riverside and closed up the efficiency apartment and moved his things to the cabin.

Steve called the Department and said he'd be reporting back to work on Monday, April 25th and also that Jack had bought the home near his and that they should let the Sheriff know. The remainder of the week was spent locating and installing a 30kw residential standby generator, a large propane tank to supply the generator and radios and antennas. They left the reloading equipment up in the shed at the cabin. Jack also bought one of the large-screen LED TV's. By Friday, when the bedroom suite was delivered, Jack and Moira's new home had a lived-in look about it and Jack was about 90% prepared for any emergency. On Saturday, they delivered his new gun safe and he pretty much considered himself prepared. He'd studied the exam questions every night and had passed the technicians examination on Saturday morning. Steve told him it would take about a week to ten days to get his new license in the mail. It came in six and he received it in the mail on the 29th of April.

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Steve and Jack had reported in at the Twin Peaks Station on the morning of April 25, 2005. Jack had to take some courses, but the Sheriff had said he could go right to work and they'd handle the details in the coming weeks. Jack was assigned to a training officer (TO) and Steve was assigned to the chopper that was based there at Twin Peaks. Many of his calls involved rattlesnake bites with the victims being transported to the emergency room at Loma Linda Hospital where they had the 'Venom ER'. It could have been worse, Jack could have gotten some TO who he didn't know, but his TO was Marty and it looked like it would work out just fine. Jack barely had time to catch his breath and he had hit the ground running.

Twin Peaks is on Highway 189, maybe halfway between Blue Jay and the Junction with Highway 18, aka Rim of the World Highway. Fortunately Jack didn't have to work on weekends for the first month. The Sheriff said he wanted to get Jack's 'feet wet' before he had to face a big weekend crowd. Jack was a very happy man when the first week ended; and, he was tired to the bone. He'd only seen Steve once during the week, at work at least. That had come when a kid had gotten bitten in the foot by a Pacific Coast rattler. They'd gotten there before the chopper and just immobilized the kid. These days you weren't supposed to use a tourniquet or lymph restrictor or cut the fang marks. Steve had come in on the chopper, checked the kid over, said, "Good job fellas," and had headed for Loma Linda to get the kid the antivenin.

Then on Saturday, April 30th, Jack went with Moira and they bought a freezer that they filled with meat. That ate up much of the day, but he did have time to find a frame for his new Technician license and post it next to his Kenwood TS-2000X. He spent Sunday cleaning his guns and putting them into his new gun safe in the basement. He'd called the Black Hills Company and ordered some of the ammo that Steve preferred on Tuesday and it hadn't arrived so he left a place for it in the basement. Not a lot of ammo, as it turned out when Jack stopped to think about it. He only ordered 5,000 rounds each of the 7.62x51mm BTHP, 7.62x51mm BTSP, 5.56x45mm BTHP, and 5.56x45mm BTSP, plus 500 rounds of the .45ACP JHP. Black Hills didn't sell the 10mm ammo so he'd picked up 2 cases at a gun store on Saturday having ordered it on Tuesday. He'd se-

lected the Winchester 175 grain Super-X Silvertip Hollow Point Ammo because it was for personal use and not for work. Work ammo was the 180 grain Remington FMJ. Jack also had Moira call Walton Feed and order three deluxe 1-year supplies for one person to replace their supplies at the cabin. This was a case, he told her, where more was better. She wasn't sure if he was talking about the food or ammo.

The new position that Moira was going to get in the Pomona store hadn't opened up yet and her first day of work wouldn't be until Monday, May 16th. That worked out well because someone had to be home to take delivery of the food and ammunition. The Black Hills delivery came on Tuesday through a dealer along with the food. All of the food was in the living room waiting to be transported to the cabin on the weekend, but Moira left the ammo for him to lug downstairs. The food in the basement was a 3-year supply for one person minus the 5 months' worth of food they'd consumed at the cabin with Sandy and Steve. They had been there about 2½ months and there were 2 of them so that meant they had enough food for 31 months or 2 people for 15½ months not considering the meat in the freezer.

There had been a stink about him wanting a 5,000-gallon propane tank. The Onan RS-15000 used 2.4 gallons per hour (gph) at full load so he wanted plenty of fuel. If he ran the generator at full load, he only had 2,083 hours of runtime. It didn't occur to him that 2,083 hours was almost 87 days and that they were unlikely to be running the air conditioning so he probably had more like 3,125 hours of runtime at 50% (1.6gph) or more like 130 days. The only way he could get a tank that size was to buy it. Those \$35,000 he'd ended up with after paying cash for the home were beginning to evaporate. On the other hand they didn't really need anything else to be prepared and he still had a few thousand dollars. Steve had helped him put together a first aid kit that he could manage. It wasn't nearly what Steve had, but he was a cop not a paramedic. Steve did slip him 25 ampoules of morphine for the kit, however. Jack knew how to administer morphine from his days in the service.

"I guess we're ready for the next disaster," Jack said. "How do you like our new home?"

"Are you sure you didn't forget to buy anything, like maybe an Abrams tank?" she kidded. "I love the house Jack. I never imagined that someday I'd have the man I always looked for and the house of my dreams."

"Well, I didn't do too bad myself," Jack said. "I have a beautiful wife, all young and full of energy, a nice new home, a new job with a future and some place to bugout to if this place becomes untenable. Heck, I even have a bed that the mattress is longer than I am."

"Not by much it isn't," she said. "You only have 6" for your pillow."

"It beats the heck out of those 80" mattresses," he said. "Maybe someday we can get a custom mattress and box springs. I was thinking maybe about the width of an eastern king and about 90" long."

“We’ll save up the money and do that,” she said. “We can move this box springs and mattress into the guest room and add a headboard and dresser. I’ll use Sandy’s computer to go on the net and shop around.”

“You know, we really ought to have a computer seeing how you got us DSL service when you ordered the phone service,” he smiled.

“Really?” she said. “I was betting Sandy you’d never take the hint.”

“Maybe I hadn’t better,” Jack replied. “What did you bet her?”

“A hot fudge sundae,” Moira smiled. “That’s one of those bets that you win either way. The only difference is the person who pays.”

“Go shopping tomorrow and get one, then,” Jack said. “You start work a week from this coming Monday.”

Now they really were prepared. Or, perhaps as prepared as a person could be living in a residential area. They couldn’t put in a septic system and would need to rely upon city water. So, if they lost one or both of those services, they’d need to head for the cabin. Steve and Sandy had the same problem as they did, though. Steve had the 6’x12’ trailer and could haul everything to the cabin between his pickup and the trailer in the event of another emergency. Jack decided that they needed a trailer too. He looked in the classified ads and found a used Kodiak 7’x14’ enclosed cargo trailer with tandem 5,200-pound axles. He went over to Steve’s and showed Steve the ad and Steve told him that it was a great trailer at an even greater price. Jack went home and called the guy. The guy told him he’d had another call on the trailer and it was first come, first served. Jack left immediately and came home with the trailer.

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The morning of Wednesday, May 4th was a bitch. Jack had been up late getting the trailer and hauling it home. Marty saw how tired Jack appeared and started ribbing him about staying up all night attending to his new wife, etc., etc., etc. Jack explained that when he’d gotten home the night before he’d had to move a ton of ammo to the basement and that it occurred to him late in the evening that he’d be better off with a cargo trailer and had been out until midnight buying one. Marty figured that Jack was probably just telling it the way it was, but he couldn’t resist teasing Jack on and off though the day. Steve had told Marty about Jack picking up that 300-gallon oil tank and setting it in the back of the pickup. Still from all that Marty had seen of Jack, Jack was a gentle giant. Most times, maybe but Jack was really tired. And sometimes when you’re a little tired, you can only take so much. All Jack needed was a good night sleep to be back to his usual self. Steve could have told Marty that and so could Randy. But, neither Steve nor Randy was there when Marty finally pushed Jack’s button.

Don't go looking for any blood, because there was none. Jack got suddenly quiet and a mask enveloped his face. It was almost as if a chill had enveloped the patrol car. Marty instinctively knew he'd gone too far and clammed up quick. They finished the last hour of the shift exchanging only that conversation that was needed to do the job. Marty caught Steve before Steve headed home and related the incident to Steve.

"You're both a darned fool and the luckiest man alive Marty," Steve said. "A big man like Jack knows to control his temper and it sounds like he did. He was up late last night buying a new used 7'x14' enclosed cargo trailer and he was already tired when he got home. I told him the trailer was a good deal when he asked me about it and he must have been forced to buy it last night or lose it. You really need to lighten up a little. I saw guys like him when I was in the Special Forces and if they ever do lose it, all you can hope is that it isn't you they want to get. Besides, a few weeks ago he had a pretty substantial amount of money and I rather suspect that he only has the \$8,500 balance in his money market account and he might be feeling a little uncomfortable being that low on funds."

"I'll make it up to him tomorrow," Marty said.

"Marty, only do that if he says anything," Steve advised. "Otherwise forget it, he will."

"He's pretty sharp for a guy who hasn't been through all of the classes or the academy," Marty commented.

"Jack would have ended up a CID Special Agent if he'd have been willing to stay in the Army 2 years longer," Steve explained and then spent about 45 minutes filling Marty in fully on Jack's background. He even pointed out that Jack had been right about the rifle used in those shootings and the lab had identified it as an M21 Springfield Armory rifle.

"What ever happened in that case?" Marty asked.

"I think it sort of fell off the earth, Marty," Steve said. "Jack said something about the CIA but didn't elaborate."

Big John – Chapter 7 – Quiet Rumbblings

Thursday, May 5th started out like any other day. Jack had gotten a good night's sleep and it showed. He was laid back, but with that edge that all cops seem to have when they're on duty. In fact, it had been Jack who had apologized to Marty for getting short with him the previous day. It had come in the form of:

"I'm sorry about yesterday afternoon, Marty, but I was dead on my feet and I just reacted badly to your teasing."

"I'm sorry too, Jack," Marty said. "I'm your TO and I knew you were tired and should have been a little more restrained."

"You realize that this doesn't mean we're going to take long hot showers together or get all mushy," Jack chuckled.

"That sounds like a line out of a movie, but I can't remember which one," Marty said.

"*Heartbreak Ridge*, Clint Eastwood, around 1985 or 1986," Jack said. "You see it?"

"DI with a recon platoon that ended up in Grenada?" Marty asked.

"That's the one," Jack said. "So, routine patrol today?"

"Patrol, Jack," Marty responded, "But routine remains to be seen."

"You bag 'em and I'll tag 'em," Jack continued the friendly banter.

"I don't know if those were the exact words, Jack, but that was *Top Gun*," Marty said, "And it was out about the same time as *Heartbreak Ridge*."

"Darn," Jack said, "I knew I was forgetting something."

"What's that Jack," Marty asked.

"I need to buy a chemical or composting toilet for my basement shelter." Jack said.

Marty couldn't see any connection to the conversation they were having and a portable toilet, but he decided he'd better not ask. There wasn't any connection and Jack would have told him so had he asked. Jack had an associative memory and sometimes some otherwise unrelated comment triggered some part of his brain and made him remember things that were in the back of his mind and nagging that he couldn't quite get to the surface. On the way home that night Jack picked up an EXCEL high capacity electric unit, which was rated at 3 adults or family of 5 and a weekend use of 6 adults or family of 8. And, it was available for only \$1,149 plus tax.

“Did you see the piece on TV last night about the earthquake swarms?” Jack asked.

“Must have missed it,” Marty said, “Lucy Jones?”

“Yeah,” Jack said, “She sure uses a lot of big words for someone who doesn’t seem to know anything definitive. We had that earlier swarm and now we’re having another swarm all up and down California. They even had a 1.5 on the New Madrid Fault.”

“That the one on the Mississippi River?” Marty asked.

“Uh, huh,” Jack said. “Been a while since they had a quake there.”

“That guy is going about 15 over,” Marty said. “We better pull him over and find out where the fire is. You handle and I’ll observe.”

“Ok,” Jack agreed.

The motorist quickly pulled over when the lights came on and Marty and Jack crossed over in front of the patrol car when they got out and walked forward. Marty positioned himself so he could observe the driver’s back by the right rear corner of the car. Jack walked up, ticket book in hand and the motorist rolled down the window.

“What’s the problem officer?” the motorist asked.

“You were doing 15 over,” Jack replied. “Could you turn off your motor and give me your license, registration and proof of insurance please?”

The motorist didn’t turn off his ignition but he fished his license out of his wallet and reached for the glove box for the insurance papers and registration. Jack released the thumb strap on his Glock and continued to observe. When the motorist had the papers and tried to hand them to Jack, Jack again asked him to turn off his motor. When the motorist declined and again tried to give the papers to Jack, Jack instructed him to turn off the motor, step out of the car and walk to the side of the road. The motorist stuck his head out the window and looked up at Jack. He must have chickened out when he saw Jack’s size because he finally turned off the motor and got out of the car. When they got to the side of the road, Marty stepped back and let Jack continued.

Jack verified the motorist’s papers and asked the man to wait while he ran a check. He ran wants and warrants on the license plate and on the driver’s license, came up blank and returned to where the man was standing. He filled out the ticket and then explained.

“I’m citing you for 10 over in a 55mph zone plus failure to wear your seatbelt,” he told the motorist. “Signing the ticket does not constitute an admission of guilt. Please sign here.”

The motorist took the ticket book, gave Jack a dirty look and signed. Jack gave the motorist his copy of the ticket, returned his papers and asked if the motorist had any questions. The motorist did not. Jack told him to slow down and the motorist got back in his car, put on his seatbelt, started it and gingerly pulled the car on the road and took off.

"We'll be seeing him again," Marty said.

"Did you write the other two speeding tickets?" Jack asked.

"No, but I know the type," Marty said. "Nice job Jack, very professional."

"Thanks, but I've written my share of tickets," Jack said.

"What did wants and warrants show?" Marty asked.

"None, but I looked at his driving record and this was his third speeding ticket in the last 12 months," Jack explained. "If he keeps this up, he'll be on foot."

"What else did Lucy Jones have to say?" Marty asked.

"There is a small swarm around Lassen Peak," Jack replied. "Not too spectacular. Lassen Peak was the only volcano in North America to erupt in the 20th Century besides Mt. St. Helens."

"You don't suppose that this is all building up to something do you?" Marty asked.

"Jones didn't seem to know and she's the expert," Jack said. "I'm just the new cop on the beat and I don't know a lot about volcanoes or earthquakes."

"They'll cover that when you get in your first class in a couple of weeks," Marty pointed out. "Did your wife start to work yet?"

Starts on the 16th," Jack replied. "Small promotion, but it's no big deal because it's a smaller store."

"Call us in Code 7 and we'll get some lunch," Marty suggested.

"Dispatch, this is Bravo-10, show us Code 7 at Lake Arrowhead," Jack advised the dispatcher.

"Bravo-10, continue patrol," the dispatcher replied. "See the man at the Mid-Mountain Gun Room about the shooting incident on Lytle Creek Road on 10 April."

"That's in Running Springs," Marty said. "Tell them 10-4, ETA 20 minutes."

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“Dispatch, Bravo-10, 10-4, ETA 20 minutes,” Jack said.

“Bravo-10, dispatch, 10-4.”

When they arrived at the store in Running Springs, Jack advised the dispatcher to show them Code 6 at Mid-Mountain Gun Room in Running Springs and they went into the store to talk to the individual who had apparently called the Sheriff’s Department. Code 6 was the code for an investigation at their location. The storeowner told them that a few days before the shooting he’d sold 12 boxes of 7.62×51mm match ammunition to a man. He hadn’t thought much about it at the time because he sold a fair amount of match grade ammunition. The only reason he’d called was that one of the TV stations had done a follow up piece on the shooting wondering why the authorities hadn’t been able to do more especially since they knew the man had used an M21 rifle, probably another space filler, and he’d remembered the man who commented that his rifle was a Springfield Armory M21.

The description of the individual wasn’t much help. WMA, about 6’ tall with an average build; brown and brown. The only distinguishing thing the storeowner could remember was that he was left-handed. Midwestern accent and probably spoke English as his native language. It was, Jack noted, the perfect description of a professional; a man who wouldn’t stand out in a crowd. They took the report and left the guy a card. Detectives might want to interview him later.

“Dispatch, Bravo-10, Code 7 at Running Springs,” Jack informed the dispatcher that they finished the investigation and were getting lunch.

“Bravo-10, Code 7, 10-4” the dispatcher replied.

Depending on where you were in the US, the phonetic alphabet used by police agencies varied. Some had gone to the new phonetic alphabet, some used the old military phonetic alphabet and some had one all of their own. Over lunch, Marty had a suggestion.

“Jack, I noticed that you didn’t release the thumb strap on your weapon until that motorist went for his glove box,” Marty said. “It might be better to loosen the thumb strap before you approach the vehicle. The guy could come up with a weapon when you approach. And him seeing you loosen the thumb strap might cause him unnecessary alarm if he’s just the average guy who was going a little fast.”

“Thanks, Marty, I’ll remember that,” Jack replied. “With the description of a possible shooter, that double homicide up on Lytle Creek Road has taken an interesting turn.”

“Oh, what do you mean?” Marty asked.

“The brand of ammunition matches what I remember seeing at the shooting that night,” Jack explained. “This possibly could be our guy. But, he’s Joe average and would be hard to pick out of a crowd. That’s just the sort of guy the agency would hire.”

“The CIA?” Marty said. “Come on Jack, you’ve been watching too many movies. They pulled a lot of the roadblocks on the interstates, did you hear?”

“No, I hadn’t,” Jack admitted.

“Yeah, the cleanup is going faster than expected in the cities the terrorists hit and the roadblocks were hampering efforts to get the country back to normal,” Marty explained. “They’re stilling having trouble getting the rural folks and those so-called patriot groups to get NIC’s, too. But with the roadblocks down, goods should start flowing again. What kind of trailer did you get?”

“It’s a used Kodiak 7’x14’ enclosed cargo trailer with tandem 5,200-pound axles,” Jack replied.

“All ready to bugout when we get the big one, huh?” Marty chuckled.

“Yeah, I guess,” Jack replied absently. “You shouldn’t make light of people being prepared, Marty. It was pretty strange for a few days after that terrorist attack. And we’ve been having those earthquake swarms off and on recently. Who knows, it could be some kind of precursor to the big one.”

“Yeah right,” Marty laughed. “Yellowstone is going to blow its top in 100,000 years and we’re going to get stuck directing traffic. Which reminds me, Jack. You are scheduled for evening classes next week. First aid class and Disaster Procedures.”

Marty Wilson was younger than Jack, maybe 42-3. He was married (Selma) with 2 kids in high school. They lived in Rialto. Maybe Marty had a little problem, or the beginning of one. His nose and ears sure seemed to be red most of the time. He admitted that Selma and he had done a little preparation, who hadn’t? It was mostly her doing and she had a large trash can in the closet filled with a few ‘essentials’, plus they had some camping gear. Earthquakes, Marty said, were just part of the California experience and he didn’t expect the Russians or Chinese to be bombing Rialto anytime soon.

That night on the way home, after getting the composting toilet, Jack stopped by a Costco and filled the back of his pickup with case after case of bottled water, which he lugged to the basement before supper. After supper he went to see Steve and told him about the call to the Mid-Mountain Gun Room in Running Springs.

“I’ll put in a call to the detective tomorrow and tell them to be on the lookout for your report,” Steve said. “I think you may be on to something, Jack. Was that water I saw you unloading earlier?”

“Yeah, I stopped by Costco and picked up a pickup load of bottled water,” Jack replied. “I put in one of those composting toilets, too.”

“You’ve really gotten into being prepared in a big way, haven’t you?” Steve observed.

“I guess so, Steve,” Jack replied. “It doesn’t make much sense to have a home and not be prepared in case of a problem. But it meant that I had to buy that trailer to haul everything to the cabin if we ending up bugging out again. That’s why I got a propane tank mounted on a transport. It will be a lot easier to move that tank than it was to move your 300-gallons of fuel. What did you do about a generator? You left your tank and generator installed up at the cabin.”

“Sandy and I dug into our savings and put in a RS 12000,” Steve replied. “I got it at Costco and it runs on natural gas. I picked up the conversion kit to convert it to propane, if necessary. There was no way we could put in 5,000-gallons of propane.”

“Moirra went to a dealer today and traded in her old car on a good used GMC pickup,” Jack said. “She and I had talked about it and she said she’d rather have a pickup than a car.”

“Gas or diesel?” Steve asked.

“Diesel with 4 wheel drive and a trailer hitch,” Jack told Steve. “One of us can haul the propane and the other can pull the trailer with the rest of our supplies.”

“Extra running tank?” Steve asked.

“That came standard,” Jack said. “Or the previous owner had one installed. Have you talked to Randy lately? He wasn’t at the cabin when we took the food up.”

“Yes, I did,” Steve replied. “You must have noticed that the tanks were buried. He met some gal who works for that contractor buddy of his who buried the tanks. He told me they had one hell of a time getting the crane up that fire road to lift those tanks. They weighed about 13 tons each, you know.”

“I’ve got night classes this coming week,” Jack related. “First Aid and Disaster Procedures.”

On Friday, May 6th, there was a lot more traffic as people from down below headed to the mountains for the weekend. Jack and Marty had a couple of accident investigations dealing with minor fender benders and the number of citations jumped dramatically. They hadn’t heard anything more concerning the investigation at the gun store in Running Springs, but it hadn’t been that long.

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3,000 miles to the east...

"That was pretty sloppy," the man with the cigarette said. "Why did you buy all of your ammunition in one store?"

"So it would all be the same lot number," the quiet man replied.

"They have your description now," the smoker said.

"That description must fit a million guys," was the reply.

"True, but he could identify you."

"If he could even remember me, he could."

"You get yourself out to Running Springs and make sure he can't," the smoker said.

"That's just going to attract more attention," the quiet man pointed out.

"Don't be seen this time."

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Saturday May 7th, both couples ventured up the mountain to visit with Randy and spend the weekend. They'd brought along steaks and baking potatoes and the makings for a salad. Randy wasn't there, but there were 2 new used fuel pumps and a small concrete slab. One pump handled diesel and the other the gas. Randy had been busy, but the pumps were out of the way and didn't really disrupt the scenery. Jack and Steve spent Saturday raking up around the place and straightening up the shed. The cabin faced south and gave the viewer a good look at the Inland Empire. The ladies gave the cabin a thorough cleaning and towards evening, Steve fired up the grill to cook the potatoes and steaks.

"Here you go," Steve said handing Jack a beer. "How do you like working with Marty?"

"Marty's ok but I think he might have a drinking problem," Jack said. "His nose and ears are red all of the time and he strains to be humorous."

"If he does, it will come out and they'll get him into the program the Department runs," Steve replied. "Good training officer?"

"Not bad," Jack said. "And he's not a bad cop either. The experience shows and he really knows the area."

"Heard any more about that investigation of the shooting on Lytle Creek Road?" Steve asked.

“No, have you?” Jack responded.

“I called the detectives and told them to keep an eye out for your report,” Steve explained. “They’ve hit a stone wall on that shooting and don’t have any leads.”

“This being married and working full time as a Deputy is cramping my style,” Jack noted.

“In what way?” Steve asked.

“When was the last time either of us got to the range?” Jack asked. “I get up early mornings and either run or lift weights. Then, I get cleaned up and dressed and there’s time for a quick breakfast before I head to work. I get home at night and it takes me an hour to decompress. I’d forgotten how stressful police work could be.”

“How’s married life?” Steve asked.

“Great,” Jack smiled. “I wasn’t sure I was ever going to get married, but that wife of mine is like a bottle of fine wine. She’s just old enough to have some character and she’s getting better with age. With neither of us having been married before, there were some minor adjustments, but it’s working out very, very well.”

“When does she start work?” Steve asked.

“A week from Monday,” Jack replied. “Which will be good. We don’t have a lot of expenses, but we’ve eaten further into our financial reserves than I like. Having 2 paychecks will allow us to do some things we’ve talked about.”

“For instance?” Steve asked.

“Well, our new bedroom suite has a California king sized mattress,” Jack chuckled. “It’s about the first time in my life that I’ve really had a mattress longer than I am. We were talking about getting a mattress the width of an eastern king but a little bit longer for the master bedroom and putting the new box springs and mattress in the guest room.”

“The price of gold is coming back down,” Steve commented.

“Man, did I sell my Eagles at the right time or what?” Jack laughed. “I still have all of the silver coins though. We each have a roll of dimes, quarters and halves in our bugout bags and a dozen Eagles apiece.”

“Let me throw the steaks on the grill,” Steve said. “Why don’t you give Sandy and Moira a heads up that I’m cooking the meat?”

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In Running Springs, the storeowner was just closing up for business when the man who'd bought all the match ammo walked in. He was the only customer in the store.

"I'm just closing up, can I help you with anything?" the storeowner asked, not recognizing the man.

Pfutt, Pfutt.

"No, I have everything I need," the quiet man said to the lifeless man. "Thanks for asking though."

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When the wives came out Sandy told Steve that there had been a shooting in Running Springs mentioned on the handi talkie radio sitting in the charger on the stand in the cabin's main room. Steve was occupied making sure the steaks were just right and the mention of the shooting didn't really register. Jack hadn't heard Sandy and Moira hadn't heard the broadcast. The two couples ate their dinner and visited about everything and nothing. After dinner they went inside and put a DVD movie on the TV. Later, Sandy popped some popcorn and Steve started the sequel to the movie. When the movie was over, the couples went to bed, having not seen the news on this particular night.

Sunday morning started late because everyone slept in. Sandy and Moira prepared a brunch and the four of them were just sitting down to eat when Randy pulled in. There was plenty of food so Randy joined them for breakfast and asked if they had heard about the shooting in Running Springs.

"We didn't watch the news last night Randy," Jack explained, "Who got killed?"

"Some gun shop owner," Randy said. "The Sheriff's Department said it looked like a robbery. The money was missing from the cash drawer as well as several guns."

Steve looked at Jack just as Jack looked at Steve. This shooting up on Lytle Creek Road was taking on a whole new dimension.

"What kind of guns were stolen, Randy, or didn't you hear?" Steve asked.

"Two M1A rifles, you know the fancy sniper type?" Randy said.

"You mean maybe the M21?" Jack asked.

"They called it a Tactical Rifle on the news," Randy said.

"That's either an M21 or an M25," Jack remarked.

"I'll call in and find out," Steve said.

Steve went to the phone and dialed the Department. He asked a few questions and returned to the table.

“You were right on both counts, Jack,” Steve said. “Whoever it was took both the M21 and the M25 White Feather the dealer had. He also took some handguns and all of the guy’s 7.62x51mm ammunition.”

“This clearly ties back in to that shooting on Lytle Creek Road,” Jack said. “The guy who did that shooting used an M21 rifle and that gun dealer was the only person we know of who had seen him and could identify him.”

After breakfast, they went into the main room and turned on the TV to try and get some news. Sunday morning in the greater LA area wasn’t exactly the best time to try and get any news. There was a news special on one of the channels featuring none other than Lucy Jones expounding endlessly about the micro earthquakes and the swarms.

We don’t really have any indication that these swarms are a precursor to anything greater, Dr. Jones told the reporter. Admittedly, there have been an unusual number of quakes, but the magnitude is so small that without the seismographs, we wouldn’t even have any indication that they were occurring.

What about that rumble they had on the New Madrid Fault? the reporter asked.

There’s no reason to believe they’re connected, Dr. Jones replied. *And before you ask about Mt. Lassen, the north side of the mountain has had a hot spot for years.*

Doesn’t anyone have any models that can tell us when a large quake will strike? the reporter asked.

We’ve been trying to develop one for years, Jones said, But so far, we’ve come up empty. There were a couple of promising models at one time, but then we had earthquakes at a different time and place than predicted. So, we really don’t have a good model and may never have one. The Earth is very dynamic. That 9.0 quake over near Sumatra is a perfect example. There weren’t any prior indications of a pending quake. And, the information the tsunami folks got was limited at best because there really aren’t many tsunami sensors in the Indian Ocean.

Thank you Dr. Jones, we’ll be right back after a commercial message, the reporter said.

“Try another channel and see if they have any news about the shooting,” Jack suggested.

There wasn’t so the men decided they would take their wives home and drive into San Bernardino and visit with the detectives assigned to the case. It was late afternoon before they arrived at the Department and the detectives assigned to the case weren’t in

the office. The first 48 hours of any murder investigation are the most critical and the two detectives were out of the office working the case. Steve suggested that since the Chief of Detectives was in the office they have a word with him.

“Chief, do you know Jack Douglas?” Steve asked entering the Chief office.

“Heard the name, haven’t had the pleasure,” the Chief said. “What are you fellas doing in the office on a Sunday?”

“We think that there is a link between the Lytle Creek Road shooting and the shooting of that gun store owner in Running Springs,” Steve said.

“Jack and I took the call on the shooting that night on Lytle Creek Road, Chief,” Steve continued. “It was a man and a woman who had both been shot once. The woman was dead and the man was DOA. The shooter used a 7.62×51mm rifle that later turned out to be a Springfield Armory M21. On Thursday, Jack and Marty interviewed that gun store owner about a sale of ammunition.”

“I guess that’s my cue,” Jack said. “The owner said he didn’t give it much thought at the time. The guy bought 12 boxes of match grade 7.62×51mm ammo. He saw a TV piece where they mentioned that the shooter used an M21 and the customer mentioned that his rifle was an M21. The brand of ammo that customer bought was the same brand used in the shooting at Lytle Creek Road. It’s all in the reports Marty and I filed.”

“I called the detectives on the Lytle Creek Road shooting and told them to keep an eye out for the reports,” Steve said. “Jack and I think there are too many coincidences.”

“Thanks for letting me know fellas,” the Chief said. “I’ll get the two sets of detectives together on this and have them compare notes. I wonder who leaked the information about the M21 rifle. That wasn’t supposed to be made public.”

No one had leaked the information. That was the problem with reporters. Take Paul Moyer, for example. Please! And shoot him with one of those .44 magnum Beretta automatic pistols with the 6-shot revolving cylinder. Anyway, a new newsman with a local TV station looking to make a name for himself dressed in casual clothes and took to hanging out in ‘cop bars’ waiting for something juicy. Reporters are easy to identify, they have big mouths and even bigger ears. Anyway, the new kid in town overheard 2 detectives discussing the Lyle Creek Road shooting and heard one of them mention an M21, whatever that was. The reporter knew the rifle used in the shootings had been a 7.62×51mm, which was on all of the news. A couple of minutes spent searching the Internet revealed that Springfield Armory made a 7.62×51mm caliber Tactical rifle and the reporter got his big break.

Steve and Jack went home and called it a night. It wasn’t really their case and they’d put 2 and 2 together for the Chief of Detectives and there wasn’t really any more they could do. Jack wasn’t really looking forward to the coming week anyway. He was too old for

this stuff. Here he'd be taking classes in First Aid and Disaster Procedures when he should be home chasing his lovely bride around the bed and making whoopee. Well, there was always tonight.

◦

There is a massive subduction zone where the North American plate, the Pacific plate, the Juan de Fuca plate and the Punta Gorda plates converge known as Cascadia. No one anywhere realized that in about 8 days on Monday, May 16, 2005 a massive quake registering 9.4 on the open ended Richter scale would strike that location putting the Indonesian quake to shame as far as property loss. It was a relatively remote area so the actual death toll as a direct result of the quake would be under 75,000. The quake would result in a tsunami with a wall of water estimated to be 1,300' high striking the cities of Ferndale, Fortuna, Loleta, Eureka, Bayside, Arcata and McKinleyville. The resulting wave would strike as far south as the coast off Atascadero in the south and as far north as Cape Disappointment where the Columbia River empties into the Pacific Ocean.

The USGS would eventually reveal that the Little Salmon fault burst forth with a 7.0 quake and nudged the subduction fault system. Everyone had been worried about the San Andreas Fault. The quake and resulting tsunami would come during mid-afternoon, just before schools in the area let out.

KGO in San Francisco would eventually report that the quake had widespread damage up and down the California coast and that there was also an 8.9 on the northern and southern ends of the San Andreas. The San Leandro fault line would wipe out the east bay areas of Alameda, San Leandro, Hayward, Berkeley, Oakland and that most of Contra Costa County would be dealing with major loss of life and damage. The convergence area was part of the Cascadian Subduction Zone. Read 'Siskiyou Islands' for details of what happened in northern California. We are still 7½ days out in this story. It would prove to be a trying time, especially for those forks near the epicenter, probably leading to some confusion over dates.

◦

On Monday, May 9th, Jack began putting in full days on the job and traveling to San Bernardino after work to arrive just in time for class. The classes lasted until 10pm and it was usually between 11 and 11:30 before he got home. The First Aid classes were fairly easy, more of a refresher course than anything. Then around 7:30 on Wednesday evening the instruction switched from talking about First Aid to Disaster Procedures. This was where it started to get interesting but by 7:30pm on Wednesday evening Jack was getting very tired. He really had to concentrate to make any sense out of what the instructor was trying to teach, not realizing at the time that in just a few short days he was going to get to put those very procedures into practice. Marty saw how tired Jack was getting and cut him more than a little slack.

Big John – Chapter 8 – Tsunami

By 11:30pm on Friday night when Jack got home, he couldn't remember when he'd been so tired. Moira was waiting up for him and needed some attention but the sum of that attention amounted to a mumbled, "Sorry honey, I'm too tired." It was a good thing for Jack that Moira wasn't some 23-year-old woman with low self-confidence. That would have been a horse of a different color. Moira had talked to Sandy, who still wasn't back to work, and Sandy told her this was the toughest week of all. After this week, Jack would get his training during the day. Jack was being run through this gauntlet to see if he could hack being tired and still do the job. It wasn't normal procedure, but then again there had been nothing normal about the way Jack had gotten the job in the first place.

So, Jack sat on the couch just to decompress and Moira cuddled up next to him. It was too late for the news other than CNN and the cable news channels that ran the news in a series of programs then started at the beginning and aired them a second time. Most of TV was aired for the eastern audience and the west coast sometimes got it twice as in the case of CNN and FOX. The good thing about it was if you missed something, you could watch the same broadcast again in 3 hours. Jack fell asleep there sitting on the couch and Moira got him a pillow and a blanket and went to bed. Sometime during the middle of the night he must have awakened because the next morning he was in bed with her. Moira had studied and gotten her technicians license, too. Saturday morning they went out and bought a pair of Icom IC-T90A tri-band handi talkies to carry in their pickups.

Moira had all of her clothes ready for the next week and had the weekend totally free. Jack had slept late and he was still a little tired, but not like during the week. After they got the new radios, they stopped by Steve and Sandy's just to visit. Steve had had quite a week. There had been 3 snakebite cases, a heart attack and a 3-car pileup. And, the law office where Sandy worked still hadn't reopened. Go figure; lawyers were as bad or worse than reporters. Reporters chased stories and glory and lawyers chased ambulances with their Scotch-lite business cards. Politicians were always seeking the truth but never seemed to be able to find it. But it had been nice when the President had suspended martial law with the dusk to dawn curfew early after the terrorist attacks but long before they took down the roadblocks.

Steve was just putting up some finishing touches on his and Sandy's preparations. He couldn't afford 5,000-gallons of propane, not by any means. What he could afford was a pressure hose long enough to reach to Jack and Moira's and a T-connector for the tank that allowed Jack to be permanently connected and for him to be temporarily connected in the event they lost their natural gas. It was an adaptation of a conventional marine setup except that it had a longer hose, two 50' hoses, in fact, connected in the middle with a coupler to make 100'.

"I hope you don't think I was being presumptuous," Steve said, referring to the hose and T-connector.

“Hell, no,” Jack said. “Let’s go put in the T-connector while the girls visit.”

It took all of about 5 minutes to install the T-connector, which already had a shut off valve where Steve could connect his hose. They reconnected Jack’s hose from his RS 15000 and they were set. Jack hadn’t installed permanent piping, obviously because the propane tank was on wheels. Steve had seen Jack’s hose and gotten the idea. Sandy found the hose on the Internet and ordered 2 50’ sections, the T-connector, the shutoff valve and a coupler to connect the hose sections. They were back at Steve and Sandy’s before the girls had even realized they’d gone. Steve spent the remainder of the day modifying his setup so his new RS 12000 was ‘portable’ and connected to the gas supplies only with hoses. He connected the hose to the generator and to the natural gas stub, which had its own valve. He could turn off the gas, disconnect and pull the hose over to Jack’s house and then switch the generator to propane. It was relatively simple, he found, to switch the generator between natural gas and propane. (I’ve described this before and the RS 12000 comes with the orifice to make the conversion.)

When Jack and Moira watched the news that evening, and the only mention of earthquake swarms was that they had stopped. They had a quiet dinner, watched some TV and went to bed early for a change. They got up late on Sunday morning and Jack went out for some of those Bavarian Crème Bismarck’s, something they both enjoyed. They ate a continental style breakfast and then put a movie on TV. That evening Jack took Moira out to dinner so she essentially had Sunday off.

Monday, May 16th was a madhouse. Jack was out early running and Moira was up early rolling her hair. When he got back, she was sitting under the dryer and he cleaned up and dressed, had some toast and left. Moira’s hair still wasn’t quite dry. Jack stopped on the way to work and filled up both tanks on his truck the same as he did every Monday morning. Then, he picked up I-10 and headed east to I-215 and made his way to work.

“Have a nice weekend?” Marty asked as they rolled out of the station.

“You bet Marty and I mostly got caught up on my rest,” Jack replied. “We did some shopping and got some handy talkies and I helped Steve hook into my propane tank so he can run his generator off my tank if the natural gas goes out.”

“You two guys are a couple of nuts,” Marty laughed. “But if we ever do have a natural disaster, I’m coming to your houses.”

“Don’t forget the cabin, Marty,” Jack smiled. “It might be necessary to bugout from the valley and up to the mountains.”

“Why, you expecting a tsunami like they got in Sumatra?” Marty joked. “The elevation at Ontario Airport is 925’ MSL (mean sea level) and at San Bernardino International Airport it’s 1,157’ MSL. It would take a pretty big wave to get in that high.”

“Not really no, but there could be all kinds of reasons for leaving the valley and going to

the mountains,” Jack said. “I’ve done some reading because of that class. Some areas around the margin of the Pacific Ocean are located near subduction zones similar to the one that produced the 1960 Chile earthquake and its tsunami. One of these areas is Cascadia-southern British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and northern California. Recently, it has been discovered that the Cascadia Subduction Zone, like the subduction zone off Chile, has a history of producing earthquakes that triggered tsunamis. The most recent of these earthquakes, in 1700, set off a tsunami that struck Japan with waves about as big as those of the 1960 Chilean tsunami in Japan.”

“However,” Jack continued, “Modern Cascadia has had little experience with tsunamis and almost no experience with tsunamis generated close to home. Because of this, people in Cascadia need to look elsewhere for guidance about tsunami survival. Many people in Cascadia may think that ‘The Big One’-an earthquake of magnitude 9-will kill them before its tsunami rolls in. So, why bother to prepare for such a tsunami? In the account, all the people in and near the town of Maullín, Chile, survived the biggest earthquake ever measured. The deaths in the area came later, during the tsunami that followed the quake.”

“How did those tsunamis compare to the one in Sumatra?” Marty asked.

“The Sumatran tsunami, has been classified as a mega tsunami by the USGS,” Jack said. “As far as I know they haven’t posted the wave height, but many of those were low lying areas. The tsunami reached 1km inland and had a height of perhaps 10-15 meters, according to some sources.”

“But in *Deep Impact*...” Marty began to say.

“...Was a movie, Marty,” Jack chuckled. “However, you have a point. The San Diego Airport is 17’ MSL, John Wayne is 56’ MSL, LAX is 126’ MSL, and Burbank and Van Nuys are between 780’ to 800’ MSL. I looked it up.”

“So, it wouldn’t take much of a wave to wipe out San Diego and Orange County airport, huh?” Marty realized.

“Right, and LAX isn’t any better off,” Jack said. “The rest should be ok.”

“It sounds to me if they got a tidal wave in Cascadia, that’s up north right, that they’d be in for some tough times,” Mary suggested.

“Yeah and a quake on the San Andreas or vice versa could trigger a quake on the other, assuming it was big enough,” Jack agreed.

“Let’s get coffee,” Marty suggested. “All this talking has me dry.”

“You look different today,” Jack said. “Do something different?”

“Not really, Jack,” Marty said. “Well, I joined a new organization over the weekend.”

“Tell me about it,” Jack said.

“Maybe someday,” Marty replied.

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Moira made it to work about 15 minutes early and checked with the Manager on duty. She showed Moira where her office was, that was something new-an office, where the lunchroom was, the ladies room and introduced her to the employees of her department. Moira was in charge of small appliances, rather than gifts like at her previous store. The department wasn't all that big and there really weren't as many products as the gifts department. She suggested that everyone go about doing what he or she usually did while she reviewed the inventory printout and got up to speed. Getting up to speed meant getting the store gossip to tell her a little bit about each of her employees.

There didn't seem to be much difference between small appliances and gifts from Moira's viewpoint. Different prices and different inventory numbers but it was still the same old shell game of putting what you wanted to push on an end cap and making sure you didn't run out of whatever was on sale. She took the inventory list out to the floor and compared the actual inventory on the floor to the inventory list and then asked Mary, her senior sales associate, about back stock. She factored the back stock in to get an idea if she had any significant shrinkage. There were some small differences, but not enough to be concerned about. It could be things that had sold on the previous day and weren't reflected in the inventory printout, which usually ran a day late anyway.

Managing a department was like being a fancy clerk in some ways. You had to deal with the returns and either put them back on the shelf, mark them down for clearance or return them to the distributor/manufacturer. It was up to the sales associates or stocker to keep the shelves full and up to Moira to make sure they had inventory on hand to accomplish that task. That was the easy part. You also had to make out the work schedules, do performance reviews, settle disputes between employees, etc. That was the hard part. Dealing with customers fell somewhere in between depending upon the customer and the nature of the customer's complaint. Sometimes it was as simple as bringing out the back stock or issuing a rain check. And, sometimes it wasn't. Every once in a while you'd get a customer that you couldn't do anything to satisfy and that was the customer who usually wanted to see your boss. And the same customer usually thought that you worked for God and a wave of his/her hand would fix anything.

Bosses don't like to be bothered by resolving customer complaints. They're good at it because they've been in your position. They make nice to the customer, promise them anything and then usually leave it up to you to figure out how to accomplish whatever it was he/she promised. God help you if an advertiser used the wrong picture in an ad. Like maybe they showed a picture of the \$98 iron instead of the \$69 iron that was the item actually on sale for \$59.95. And, they didn't care that the text in the ad clearly de-

scribed the \$69 iron, they want the one in the picture. They weren't blind or probably dumb, but they were deaf and THEY HAD EYES! So, one of Moira's duties was to review the ads and post disclaimers before the store opened.

She had lunch with one of the other department managers who gave her opinion of the store, the manager, the assistant manager and all of the other department managers including her predecessor. And it was a little bit of, "Well, you know how she is..." And, this was one of the other department managers, not the official store gossip. It was all part of the job, unfortunately. At least being tall, Moira got to wear comfortable shoes. That became important to a department manager in a retail store that had a bunch of crabby sales associates and even crabbier customers. She wasn't even able to take her afternoon break until about 2:45.

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Marty's remark triggered something in Jack's mind and he noticed that Marty's nose was a little less red and so were his ears. They gave out a couple of seatbelt tickets and 4 for speeding and then broke for lunch. Marty was a little less talkative after their morning coffee break, but Jack didn't really have much time to think about it and the next thing he knew Marty had him calling in the Code 7. They had lunch in Crestline and got back on the highway to chase down more speeders and give more directions and call another tow truck. They broke for coffee about 2:40 when they were in Lake Arrowhead. Jack was discussing that double killing on Lytle Creek Road and how he thought it related to the killing of the gun storeowner they interviewed in Running Springs when all hell broke loose.

"What the hell..." Marty said. "Earthquake, Jack, let's get to the unit."

Except, there was no getting to the unit. At least not right away. The ground was rocking and rolling and shaking something awful. Earthquakes generate rolling motions and the shocks sometimes come in waves. A wave would hit and knock them down and they'd get back up and the next wave would hit. Jack got smart quick and stayed sitting on the ground in the parking lot. It took Marty a couple of extra tries, but he got smart too. At least they were out of the building and Jack couldn't see anything that could fall on them so they just sat there and rode the rollercoaster until the shaking stopped. Marty got up when it was all over and ran to the car to call in. Jack went back into the café to make sure everyone was all right. There were no injuries requiring medical attention so the two men started checking the area looking for injured.

"I'm not sure Marty," Jack said, "But I think that qualified as the big one."

"Could be, partner," Marty said, "That's the biggest earthquake I've ever experienced. It must have been an 8.5, hell maybe even a 9."

For the next hour, Jack and Marty scoured the area locating the injured and calling for ambulances or air transport. But, there wasn't any air transport available. Steve had

been airborne when the quake hit and the pilot noticed the shaking and told him over the intercom that they had a big earthquake going on. The pilot radioed in immediately but it was a couple minutes before he could raise anyone on the ground. When he finally did, he was told to RTB and refuel because they'd just had the big one. Hell, they didn't know the half of it or maybe even a quarter of it because they didn't know that a massive tsunami hit northern California and an area 400 miles up and down the coast. They didn't know that Baja California was no longer a peninsula but a large island.

They didn't know that a lot of the coast had undergone a significant elevation increase in the sea level raising the water level to the point where the San Diego airport was underneath 33' of water and that John Wayne was just short of being flooded. Neither did they know that the Salton Sea was beginning to merge with a great influx of seawater into the low desert areas. They didn't know that the Hosgri fault which is near Diablo Canyon had ruptured and forced the reactors to scram. They didn't know a lot of things.

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There were families to consider, including their own families, but they didn't really have time to do that, there were so many injured people who required assistance. Some of the area hospitals had come through the quake and some had sustained damage ranging from minor to significant. And Jack's new tri-band radio was back in his glove box in his pickup parked in the parking lot at the Twin Peaks Sheriff's Station, so he couldn't call Moira and check on her.

When the chopper got back to the Sheriff's Station and they started to refuel it for a long afternoon and night of work, Steve was able to try and call Sandy. The phone lines were either down or busy but the result was the same, he couldn't get through. So, he went to his pickup and called Sandy on the 2-meter band with his dual-band handy talkie and was relieved to learn that she was ok. The power, gas and water were out she told him and he told her how to hook up to Jack's propane tanks and where the orifice and instructions were to switch the RS 12000 to propane usage. He'd told her on Sunday when he finished up his project so this was basically a reminder. Sandy told him she could handle it and that she'd already turned off the water. He told her the primary 2-meter frequency that Jack and Moira were planning to use on their handy talkies was on a piece of paper on his workbench in the basement and it might be a good idea for her to try and contact Moira and do what she could to get Moira to safety. If the house was safe they should stay at one or the other of the homes. And if they couldn't be inhabited for any reason, that Moira and she should try and get to the cabin. Sandy said she'd take care of everything, she'd been writing it all down.

Steve raised Jack on the department radio and told him that Sandy was ok and she was checking on Moira for him. Jack told Steve to get his tri-bander out of his glove box using the key in the magnetic box in the right front wheel well and bring him the radio when he could. Marty and he, Jack said, were in Lake Arrowhead and they had a lot of injured people requiring transport. Steve told him that Marty and he should triage the patients and he'd see about getting the chopper to Lake Arrowhead when they were al-

lowed. Steve got Jack's radio and stuck it in a leg pocket of his coveralls/flying suit and returned to the chopper.

Moira had gotten out of the store ok and the first thing she did was to check on the people in her department and the customers in the store. Everyone, customers and employees alike, had gotten out of the store. There were some minor injuries but the store had designated persons on every shift who were Red Cross certified in First Aid and/or CPR. There really wasn't a lot she could do so the Manager on Duty told her to go home. It appeared that the store would be closed for several days or perhaps even weeks because they couldn't reopen until the building was inspected by Pomona building inspectors and certified to be safe. The Manager also suggested that this had been the big one.

Moira got to her truck; she'd gotten fuel on her way to work too, and got the tri-band radio out of the glove box. First, she tried to raise Jack on the designated frequency on each of the bands. That failing she put the handy talkie on the two-meter band and tried to raise Steve or Sandy on their primary frequency. Sandy had been trying to raise Moira on the 2-meter band on Jack and Moira's primary frequency and had given up in frustration and switched their base radio back to Steve and her primary frequency. This was when the women finally connected. Aren't radios wonderful? Sandy told Moira that there wasn't much juice for the battery running the inverter and she was going to have to get the generator running. Moira told her not to bother because theirs was probably already running and there was a key to the front door in the pot with the geranium on the front porch. She asked Sandy to check out their house and wait there.

Sandy gave Steve a quick call on 2-meters and told him Moira was ok and headed home. Steve said, "I heard, honey and I'll notify Jack" and cleared the channel. Sandy went 2 doors down, found the geranium on the front porch, retrieved the key and let herself in after shutting off the water. Jack and Moira had electricity so she made a fresh pot of coffee using bottled water and waited for Moira to get home. She was on her second pot of coffee by the time that happened.

Moira had a LA County/San Bernardino County Thomas Guide and that saved her bacon, so to speak. She also had her BOB in the truck and in the BOB was, among other things, a present from her husband in the form of his issue 92FS pistol and 3 15 round magazines. It was only a loan until he could get her something more permanent, but she was armed, albeit without a CCW. Moira started home from the store but only got a couple of blocks before she ran into a massive traffic block caused by several cars slamming together when the quake struck. She did a quick U-turn and took the first right and right again to parallel what would have been her normal route. She'd driven the route several times during the previous week but hadn't bothered to check out alternative routes, a mistake in foresight. That street was a dead end so she reversed course went back to the street she'd turned off of, turned right again with the same result.

This time when she got back to the street, she parked the pickup and used a highlighter from the glove box to mark several routes that would get her from where she was to

where she wanted to go, e.g., home. She was about half way there when the first after-shock struck. Fortunately, she wasn't traveling too fast because she didn't know the area and was watching for street signs. She pulled over and waited for the aftershock to abate and then continued on her way. She was nearly home when the second aftershock hit and pulled over, let it end and finished her trip home. She went into her home and gratefully accepted the proffered cup of coffee.

Sandy called Steve on her handy talkie and told him Moira was home and safe and they were at Jack and Moira's home. Steve called Jack and gave him the good news. In turn, Jack gave them the results of their triage and Steve told him that Lake Arrowhead was next on their list. By this time, thoughts of dirty bombs and roadblocks and double homicides and the murder of the gun storeowner were things of distant memory. Jack and Steve finally managed to hook up in Lake Arrowhead and Steve gave Jack his radio. There had been 3 persons with life threatening injuries including one heart attack victim. That person unfortunately expired before they could get the chopper to Lake Arrowhead.

Jack called Moira and made sure she was safe and told her that he had no idea when he might be home. Moira told Jack not to worry about it that she was with Sandy and they'd be ok. It was close to 2am when the duty Sergeant told Marty and Jack to knock off. The CNG had arrived and they could take over. The fellas, he said, should go home, have a hot meal and get some sleep. They should keep their radios on in case they were needed. Otherwise, he said, they should plan on reporting back at 10am or call in and explain why they couldn't.

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It was close to 5am by the time he pulled into his driveway. Both Moira and Sandy had stayed up all night or had gotten up early, probably the former. Steve still wasn't home. Jack had eaten, showered and was fast asleep when Steve came dragging in around 6:30 am. The first thing Steve did when he got home was to convert the generator to propane, pull the hose and fire up the standby generator. He showered while Sandy made him breakfast... they were back at their house, wolfed down the food and crawled into bed. His instructions were the same as Jack's. Unfortunately both men were so tired that they forgot to set their alarm clocks and it was close to 11am when Jack got up and 11:30am when Steve got up.

That first after shock had been 7.2 and the second 6.6. During the night, they had been more aftershocks, but Jack dreamed he was in a rocking boat, fishing, and the aftershocks hadn't awakened either man. Sandy had prepared Steve's food in an electric skillet because the stove was natural gas and they didn't have any propane burners. Moira had prepared Jack's breakfast on the 4-burner propane cook top in the basement. After they had gotten cleaned up, dressed and eaten a hardy breakfast, they called in separately, using radios. Both men were told to take the day off and report directly to the Sheriff's station in San Bernardino the next day. This gave the two of them time to install the propane jets in their hot water heaters so they could take a hot, rather than a

cold, shower in the coming days. They also agreed on a single 2-meter frequency that all 4 would use on their handy talkies from now on. Jack and Steve went out and found jets so they would burn propane.

Then, the 4 of them sat down in front of Jack and Moira's large screen LED TV and watched the news. That was when they learned the extent of the damage and the story about the other earthquakes and the tsunami. It was Steve's 'friend' Dr. Lucy Jones explaining with her usual lack of emotion how a 7.0 had triggered the 9.4 off the northern coast, which in turn had triggered the 8.9's on the San Andreas. The quake on the southern San Andreas had caused seawater to rush in and joined the Salton Sea and had cut off the Baja Peninsula, etc., etc., etc. Doc Lucy had endless explanations telling everyone what happened in a geologic manner of speaking. Finally KNBC cut back to Paul Moyer who seemed to imply that the USGS should have known this was going to happen because of the swarms. Then they cut to their sister station in San Francisco, KGO.

"I've heard enough," Jack said, "Is it ok if I turn it off?"

"Yeah, Doc Lucy isn't on anymore," Steve kidded.

Just then, the doorbell rang and Jack got up to answer the door. It was Marty, Selma and their two teenagers.

"Hey Marty, come in partner," Jack grinned as he greeted them. "Is this Selma and your family you finally brought over to meet us?"

"Yeah, Jack, hey you said..." Marty stammered.

"Come on in," Jack said, "I've half been expecting you."

They came in seemingly feeling awkward, and introductions were made all around. Sandy, Moira and Selma went to the kitchen, Sissy and Marty, Jr. were left to spar over the TV and Steve, Jack and Marty repaired to the basement.

"I'd offer you a beer," Jack said, "But since you joined AA, how about a cup of coffee instead?"

"I didn't tell you I joined AA," Marty snapped.

"But you did, didn't you, and right about now a cold beer would really taste good, wouldn't it." Jack was all smiles.

"Yeah, but how did you know?" Marty asked.

"You're looking good Marty, Jack said. "The shiny red nose is about gone and your ears are back to normal. I've dealt with it before at the construction company. I promise you,

it will get better. But, you're doing good, not slipping when you had a real reason to do so."

"You seem to know the lingo," Marty said, "Are you one of us?"

"No, sorry," Jack said, "But I had a couple of old-timers working for me who showed me the ropes so I could help a couple of guys who needed some help. I was going to mind my own business until you were ready. But now that you've taken the first step, I'll do everything in my power to help you. I took in a couple of open meetings so I'd have a better idea what it's about. It's just a disease like the mumps or measles."

"You guys ready for coffee?" Moira asked, bring a pot and 3 mugs.

"Hang on everyone," Steve said as another aftershock hit.

"So, Marty," Steve asked, "Do you have any idea why they don't want us up at Twin Peaks tomorrow?"

"They didn't tell you?" Marty asked. "Landslides closed the roads and you can't get to there from here except by helicopter."

"I tried to reach Randy, Jack," Steve said, "But the phone line is down."

"Did you try his cell phone?" Jack asked.

"Didn't have the number," Steve replied.

"Say, how did you call in with the phone lines down?" Marty asked.

"I used my handy talkie and hit a repeater," Steve replied.

"You probably hit my repeater," Jack laughed. "Buying radios turned out to be like eating peanuts and I didn't know when to stop. I ended up putting in a police band radio, a marine radio, and aviation radio and a police band radio repeater. That's why the antenna mast looks like a Christmas tree."

"I guess I never looked up," Steve shrugged.

"That's one of those self-supporting masts," Jack explained. "I don't know a lot about it, I'm new to radio. All I can tell you, Steve is that they hooked everything up to the radios and it works well. Plus the mast telescopes so it can be collapsed and moved, like say to the cabin."

"Rock and roll," Marty said as another aftershock hit.

"So, Mr. Rockefeller," Steve kidded, "Do you have any money left?"

“Not one hell of a lot no,” Jack admitted. “About 5 grand in the bank plus our silver and gold coins. I was sort of counting on Moira’s job to help replace the money I spent, but oh well.”

“I suspect that they’re going to be working us about 16 on and 8 off, for the next week or two,” Marty said. “So can you guys put me and my family up or what?”

“You can stay with Sandy and me, Marty,” Steve said. “Jack and Moira are short a bed. But, you’ll have to either put Sissy or Marty, Jr. over here unless you want them sleeping together. We have a queen in the guest bedroom and a full in the 3rd bedroom. Jack and Moira have a full sized bed in their spare bedroom.”

“We’ll let the ladies work it out,” Jack suggested.

“Work what out?” Moira asked bringing in a fresh pot of coffee.

“Where everyone is going to sleep, honey,” Jack replied.

“Oh, Marty, Selma and Sissy are staying with Sandy and Steve,” she cooed, “Marty Jr. is staying with us.”

Big John – Chapter 9 – Disaster Procedures 101

One of the first things the instructor had emphasized during the previous week of classes, had that only been last week, was that disasters happened and when they did people tended to focus on family and friends. As public servants who would be the first people to respond to a disaster, the Sheriff's Department employees had to shift their focus to the needs of the public and their friends and families came last. They were told that most people would be trying to get home and make sure that the other members of their families were ok. That had been what had prompted Jack to buy the tri-band handy talkies. He might not be able to get home, but he could contact Moira. From now on, everywhere he went, he was taking the tri-bander and not leaving it in the pickup.

The CNG had more demands on its resources than it could meet. Bush apparently had nationalized the Guard Units in several other states and sent them into California to help the survivors of the largest quake, 9.4, in history. But, they would be some time in arriving, depending upon where they were coming from. FEMA was out in full force, especially in northern California where they'd taken the largest hit. Steve, Marty and Jack didn't have time to concern themselves with northern California, central California or even San Diego. San Diego was mostly under water anyway. Most of downtown San Diego was barely above mean sea level (MSL). With the shift in the sea level and the flooding of the downtown area most of the remaining southern California CNG resources had been directed to Orange County and Los Angeles County.

They finally hooked up with Randy and Randy had gotten a dozer somewhere and had cleared the landslides blocking access to the cabin. So, if push came to shove, they could always retreat to the cabin. On Wednesday morning, May 18th the 3 men reported in to the Sheriff's Department in San Bernardino and were given their assignments. Marty had been right, it was to be 16 on and 8 off, presuming enough Deputies showed up to relieve them. Otherwise, it could get to be as bad as 24 on and 8 off. Steve, Jack and Marty had cornered the Chief Deputy and explained that their families were unprotected. They requested/half-demanded CCW's for their wives. Since the Chief Deputy knew Sandy and Selma and was willing to take Steve's word that Jack's wife Moira was well qualified with a handgun, the CCW's were immediately forthcoming. A most unusual occurrence, but these were most unusual times.

The word was that the rest of the nation had begun having quakes as well. All along the Mississippi corridor small to moderate quakes up to 5.5 were happening. The New Madrid fault had gone off with an amazing 7.3 quake. Massive relief efforts were beginning to respond to that disaster. Mount Lassen was also spitting out more and more steam and ash. And quake activity in Yellowstone was also increasing and Old Faithful suddenly stopped its regular eruption schedule. Martial law had been declared in most regions of the United States, again.

Their assignments were all the same, conduct a door-to-door search of the houses in the county and look for the injured and dead. The Department was coordinating with the various local police agencies and the entire county had been divided up into search ar-

eas. San Bernardino County is the largest county in the contiguous 48 states. The Sheriff's Department consists of several divisions: Aviation, Academy, Bureau of Administration, Civil Liabilities, Communications, Employee Resources, Internal Affairs, Legal Counsel, Narcotics, Public Affairs, Scientific Investigations, Specialized Investigations and the Volunteer Forces.

Looking within the County, one would find: Adelanto PD, Apple Valley PD, Barstow Station, Big Bear Lake PD, Big Bear Lake Station, Central Station, Chino Hills PD, Chino Hills Station, Colorado River Station, Fontana Station, Grand Terrace PD, Hesperia PD, Highland PD, Loma Linda PD, Morongo Basin Station, Needles PD, Rancho Cucamonga PD, Twentynine Palms PD, Twin Peaks Station, Victor Valley Station, Victorville PD, Yucaipa PD, Yucaipa Station and the Yucca Valley PD.

The County had an estimated population of just below 2 million in 2003 and there were 616,493+ housing units to be searched. The San Bernardino County Fire Department provided administration and support for 32 legally separate fire districts and countywide services such as hazardous materials regulation, dispatch communications and disaster preparedness. The fire districts served 328,260 citizens within 16,225 square miles of unincorporated areas and five cities. The County covered 20,062.2 square miles, a lot of area for those Police Departments and the Sheriff's office to cover. The search was going to take days. San Bernardino County reaches from Pomona to the Colorado River east and west and from north of China Lake to Ontario north and south (west side) and from north of State Line to south of Blythe north and south (east side). Much of the County was empty desert.

Since Jack and Steve lived in Pomona and Marty was living there temporarily, they were assigned to search the general area where they lived. This wasn't the state or federal government making decisions here; it was the local folks who were smarter than the state or the feds. By the end of the week, San Bernardino had been fully searched, thanks to some National Guard troops showing up. And, by the end of the week, Jack, Steve and Marty had put in $18+16+16+16+16=82$ hours which included 26 hours of time and a half/double time. That really helped their checkbooks. The following week they worked 16 hours a day for 6 straight days, 96 hours, which was even better.

Before we get back to the timeline, it should be noted that in the hours and days following the disaster Canada and Mexico told the US that considering the circumstances, each of the 3 nations would help themselves. The UK offered assistance immediately, but that 9.4 quake of the northern California coast at Petrolia had sent a massive wave across the Pacific Ocean. Bush suggested to Blair that the UK help those folks and the US would take care of itself. Neither choice was really a bargain for the folks in the UK. They'd given massive aid in the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami and were needed now to, possibly, give much more.

Congress, in its infinite wisdom, passed a catch-all bill that provided an initial 1 Billion dollars in assistance for the agencies dealing with the emergency like the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, just to name one, and a provision to extend the regis-

tration period for the NIC registrations to January 2, 2006. Bush was neatly side stepped and he had to sign the bill. Republican Congressional Leaders told him that was the only offer they were going to make; if he signed the bill, other provisions would kick in to provide additional funding for FEMA, etc., etc., etc. Bush signed the bill but he wasn't grinning this time.

Now to back up and tell you what happened back after that 9.4 subduction quake. The 1960 Chile earthquake not only triggered a tsunami that killed Ramón Atala, it also changed his Monterey pine plantation outside of Maullín, Chile, into a salt marsh. The pines, grown for timber, covered low ground around Mr. Atala's barn. During the earthquake, this land was lowered. Because tides were then able to inundate the plantation, the ground became too wet and salty for the trees to survive. What happened to Mr. Atala's plantation happened at many places along Chile's coast. When a 600-mile-long stretch of the South American tectonic plate was thinned during the 1960 earthquake, nearby land was lowered as much as 8 feet. The sea was then able to cover coastal pastures, farms, and forests. Coastal areas were also lowered and submerged in Cascadia after the 1700 Cascadia earthquake. These areas include a Native American fishing camp. After being inundated by the 1700 tsunami, this fishing camp became a tidal flat or a tidal marsh.

The only written records of the 1700 Cascadia earthquake came from Japan that had been hit by a tsunami, causing a relatively small loss of life. There were records in the soil up there by Petrolia, however. In the Chilean quake, the ground lowered 8' on the shore, much as had happened in San Diego and Los Angeles to varying degrees. This Cascadian earthquake was a 9.4 compared to the earlier quake in 1700, which was an estimated 9.0, thus, the wall of water it sent across the Pacific was much higher. On the Richter scale, 8 times 10 equals 9 and 9 times 10 equals 10 and 10 times 10 equals 11. Does the word logarithmic ring a bell? Think in terms of ten raised to 1.4th power. How do you know this? Well ten raised to the 2nd power is 100, right? That's a one-power increase. Ten raised to the third power is 1,000, which is 100 times 10. Bear with me.

So, if we go up 1 whole number on the Richter scale, the increase is like going from 10 to the first power to 10 to the second power or a ten-fold increase. And if we go up 2 whole numbers, the increase is like going from 10 to the first power to ten to the third power or a hundred-fold increase. That 9.4 in 2005 was somewhere between 10 times more powerful and 100 times more powerful than the 9.0 earthquake back in 1700. Excel says that 10 raised to the 1.4th power equals 25, so the 9.4 earthquake in 2005 was 25 times more powerful than the 9.0 quake in 1700. Got it? Good, my head hurts remembering all that. It isn't algebra, but it can save your life; or, maybe it is, I can't remember. So, was the wall of water racing across the Pacific Ocean at 800kph 25 times higher? Darned if I know, but it sure was wet, salty too. Actually...

The 1960 9.5 off the coast of Chile, sent a wall of water slamming into Hilo, Hawaii. The first wave at midnight was only a 4' wave leading many to believe that the danger had passed. Forty-five minutes later a 9' wave hit and around 25 minutes later (1:04am) a 14' wave hit resulting in the deaths of 61 people and 282 seriously injured. The wave

from the May 2005 quake sent a wall of water almost as high as the 1960 Chilean quake. Hawaii was ok because they had the tsunami-warning center and lots of time. And, people believed the tsunami warnings coming on the heels of the Sumatran tsunami. Australia, Japan, Korea and other countries affected by the quake had similar warnings and took similar precautions. The largest loss of life that Jack, Steve and Marty heard about was in the South China Sea, but they didn't get any details. The wave height had more to do with the displacement in the subduction zone and the depth below the surface than it did with the magnitude of the quake. Still that meant a 14' wave, 3½ times taller than the average man.

On the first day they returned to work, they got their assignments and went to Pomona. It was less than 48 hours after the quakes. People who were able were still digging themselves out of the rubble or looking for friends and family. The men weren't assigned to stop and help everyone, there were too few of them and too many people needing help. They were more in the nature of coordinators. They had the means of communication and as they searched, quickly the first time and more in depth the second, they communicated needs back to the central station and the station took it from there. Think of it was a mobile triage team, if you prefer. Resources were stretched to the breaking point and beyond. The thing about it was, by the time 48 hours had passed, e.g., 3pm on Wednesday, most of the seriously injured people had been recovered or had expired.

Search and Rescue turns to body recovery after enough time has passed. And body recovery is important for the loved ones, but with the passage of time, it only becomes worse. Don't let anyone ever tell you that Vicks in your nose can mask the smell of death. It might help, partially; people also smell with their mouths. In many cases, it wasn't that 8.9 quake that killed them. That weakened the building; and, it was the 7.2 or the 6.6 aftershocks that brought the building down. Maybe that's why they tell you to stay away from building after a quake, huh? Maybe that's why Moira's store would be closed for a while. Wednesday was bad, Thursday worse and Friday defied description. By Saturday it was no longer SAR but body recovery. The National Guard units were there and K-9 units were brought in from about everywhere. Sometimes, you didn't need a dog and its sensitive nose. Sometimes you could smell the death even over the Vicks.

The following week they weren't on SAR duty anymore. There were lots of downed freeway overpasses and bridges making a nightmare out of traffic. People in southern California had cars and they all liked to drive them. It almost seemed that they were making up places to go despite a sharp increase in gas prices because of shortages and the roads being a mess. That probably wasn't the case; more likely it was the fact that so many streets had damage of one sort or another. Jack didn't care for traffic duty, probably most cops didn't. It was risky standing in an intersection directing the cars and worse, it was frustrating. It seemed after a couple of hours of directing cars his whistle should have been worn out. And of course, there were the drivers who wanted to turn left but waited until they were in the middle of the intersection to put on their turn signal.

Jack was honestly thinking about volunteering to go out and look for more bodies as awful a job as that was. And this went on for a full 6 days.

The quake had come on May 16th and they had returned to work on the 18th. They'd done SAR through Saturday, May 21st and had pulled traffic duty from Sunday, May 22nd through Friday, May 27th. They weren't hearing much from up north where it was really bad, either. They had no idea what that meant. The lack of news could be intentional or just the result of circumstances. The men were coming into Memorial Day weekend and they were tired. Late afternoon on Friday, the Sergeant showed up and told Marty and Jack to knock off until Tuesday May 31st. The roads were open and they were to report back to Twin Peaks on the 31st.

Marty, Jack and Steve were worn out and they ate dinner, cleaned up and went to bed. They slept in Saturday morning and woke up somewhat refreshed. Because it was a holiday weekend, they decided it might be good to get up to see the cabin and away from the valley. They reached Randy and told him they were coming. That gave him a little time to clean up the cabin and do some of the dishes. There were steaks in the freezer at the cabin but they wouldn't have time to thaw if they waited until they got there so Sandy and Moira pulled out 9 steaks between them and set them out to thaw. They had a 20-pound bag of baking potatoes from Costco so they grabbed those and the steaks and headed up the mountain.

"Hey Jack," Randy said, "How'd you fellas make out in the valley?"

"I have no idea what LA is like Randy, but the Inland Empire survived," Jack replied. "Well most of it anyway."

"Lots of people killed?" Randy asked.

"Lots, yes, huge numbers, no," Steve answered for Jack.

"How are you Steve?" Randy grinned. "You must be Jack's Training Officer Marty, call me Randy." Randy said offering his hand to Marty.

"Randy, where you born in a barn or a hog house?" Sandy said sticking her head out the door.

"You should have seen it before I cleaned up Sandy," he chuckled in reply.

"Jack, tell me something" Steve said.

"What?" Jack asked.

"Why do you use 25-gallon propane tanks in your trailer?" Steve inquired.

“Well, I’ll tell you Steve,” Jack responded. “I guess I have a lazy streak. The normal tank is 40# which is 10-gallons. I ran across some 100# house tanks, that’s 25-gallons, and since they fit in the spot, I started using them instead. But, I only fill them 90% full to leave headroom, so I call them 90# tanks or 22½-gallon tanks depending upon what mood I’m in. Why?”

“Just curious,” Steve explained. “I think I’ll hook one up to the gas grill. It should last all summer.”

Please recall that this time the bottles were filled to 90%. They got one of the house bottles out of the shed and hooked it up to the grill. Steve warmed the grill up and started the baking potatoes. They were pretty good-sized potatoes so it took a while for them to get soft. When they were ready, he put the steaks on the grill and told Jack to give the girls a heads up. In deference to what Marty was trying to accomplish, everyone drank iced tea, this time. The women and kids came out and set the table, it was warm that day, and brought out the vegetable Sandy had prepared. It was sautéed mushrooms for the steaks. They sat down to eat and Sandy lit into Randy.

“I can see why your wife left you Randy, she must have gotten tired of picking up after you,” Sandy said.

“Well, I took out the trash and swept the floor,” Randy protested.

“You never scrubbed the toilet or washed down the shower walls or cleaned any of the sinks,” Sandy kept on. “I didn’t see any dirty dishes, what did you do, eat TV dinners and use plastic forks?”

“Uh-huh,” Rand admitted.

“I told you,” Sandy said to Moira. “So don’t you like anything besides Salisbury steak?”

“It’s, uh, predictable,” Randy explained.

“That’s not a well balance diet,” Moira added.

“Sure it is. I had Grape Nuts with milk and a glass of orange juice for breakfast, a burrito for lunch and a TV dinner for supper.” Randy replied. “Have to keep my strength up; I’ve got a new girlfriend.”

“Let me guess,” Jack said. “She about 15 years younger than you are has a chest out to here and is a natural blonde.”

“Two out of three aren’t bad, Jack, this one’s a redhead,” Randy replied. “But, she’s dumb enough to be blonde.”

“All blondes aren’t dumb,” Sissy said.

“Present company excluded, name one that isn’t,” Marty said.

“Well, I heard that Sharon Stone has an IQ of 154,” Sissy replied.

And, Sharon Stone was attractive, wealthy, had nice legs, the whole 9 yards. Oh yeah, and married. [More than once, and bisexual] Marty, very wisely, shut up. The valley was still getting small aftershocks. After the Northridge quake they were getting aftershocks for 10 years and they were sometimes big aftershocks. These aftershocks, however, were more in keeping with an 8.9 earthquake and frequently made it to the 4-5 range, or higher.

“So we get to go back to work up in the mountains, Steve said. “Jack what’s the status on that double homicide and the death of that gun storeowner?”

“Haven’t had any time to find out, Steve,” Jack explained. “Say, did you guys arrange the earthquake as a practical test of the class I took the week before it happened?”

“No,” Steve replied, “But I’ll bet the class came in handy.”

“Nah,” Jack said, “Marty insisted on giving mouth-to-mouth to all of the good looking women.”

“I did not,” Marty protested.

“I think you guys all need another night’s sleep,” Moira said. “You’re all still a little punchy.”

Punchy! They were acting downright silly. Both Steve and Jack were curious about how the investigation was going on the three homicides but they hadn’t had a chance to follow up because of the week of class Jack had attended followed by two long weeks of tragedy as they muddled through cleaning up after the BIG ONE.

It’s really hard to imagine what must go through peoples’ minds when they hear the term the BIG ONE used in reference to an earthquake. You could ask those families that lived in the homes on Balboa Boulevard to define the BIG ONE and they might tell you it was that 6.7 temblor that hit Northridge, California on January 17, 1994 at 4:30:55 am. 57 died and over 1,500 were injured. Or, you could consider Kobe, Japan (6.9) killing 6,000 and injuring 415,000 at 5:46am on January 17, 1995. On September 1, 1923 an earthquake hit Tokyo & Yokohama (7.9) killing 140,000. Two in China killed over 200,000 with a third killing 255,000. The largest recorded death toll was Shansi, China January 23, 1556 when a magnitude ~8.0 quaked killed about 830,000. What is the BIG ONE? That’s the one that destroys your home or kills someone in your family. The most powerful quake ever recorded was a 9.5, the 1960 Chile quake.

Remember Alaska back in 1964? A few quotes from the US Department of Commerce report will give some of the key facts:

“March 27: 17:36:14.2. Epicenter 61.0 north, 147.8 west, southern Alaska, depth about 33 km, ... Magnitude 8.5,” [Note: since this description was published, the magnitude has been revised to 9.2.]

“... Maximum intensity IX-X. Felt over approximately 700,000 square miles of Alaska, and portions of western Yukon Territory and BC, Canada. This was one of the most violent earthquakes ever recorded and was accompanied by vertical displacement over an area of 170,000-200,000 square miles. The major area of uplift trended northeast from southern Kodiak Island to Prince William Sound, and east-west to the east of the sound. ...”

“This earthquake generated a seismic sea wave (tsunami) that devastated towns along the Gulf of Alaska and left serious damage at Alberni and Port Alberni, Canada, along the west coast of the United States, and in Hawaii.”

“Only the sparse population and time of occurrence when schools were closed, business areas uncrowded, and tides low prevented the death toll from surpassing 131. (Civil Defense estimates included 122 deaths from the tsunami and 9 from the earthquake.) Total damage from the earthquake and tsunami was between \$400 and \$500 million.”

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A second night of good sleep did wonders for the three Deputies and they moved beyond the silly stage and got down to some serious planning. Randy had kept the bulldozer because it came close to wiping out a debt the owner owed him and he couldn't pay Randy because his firm was in trouble too, due to the supply problems. It was a spare/backup dozer he rarely used so they both ended up happy. Jack's antenna arrangement intrigued Steve and he pressed Jack for the details of the mast/antenna set-up.

Jack couldn't tell him much, only that the tower ran about 3 grand and the antennas another 'thousand or so'. Jack told Steve he'd give him the invoice when they got home, but asked why Steve wanted the information. The dealer usually kept a couple of the towers on hand, according to Jack, and he had a whole back room of antennas. Steve said with the extra money they made with all of the overtime and the savings that Sandy and he had, he was thinking about putting a similar rig at the cabin. The cabin, he went on to say, was turning into quite the little survival retreat. Since Jack had that repeater up here, if he did go with the antenna, Steve said he'd have that antenna added. And, if it was really affordable he, Steve, might even add a 2-meter 'private' repeater.

“My whole radio shack is set up in a way that I can just disconnect the antennas and power cords and move it essentially intact,” Jack told Steve. “I'll do something with

those antenna switches that short to ground and we can yank the entire setup and use it here at the cabin if necessary. By the way, I went for the powered raise/lower option but manual will work just as well.”

“Do you have any radiation equipment Jack?” Steve asked.

“You mean like a Geiger Counter?” Jack asked. “Nope.”

“I got a recertified CDV-715,” Marty said. “And dosimeters for the family. Selma got them at some place in Texas.”

“I have a recertified CDV-717,” Steve said. “Maybe Jack should look at that package deal that Texas Company has.”

“I remember the name,” Marty snapped his fingers. “It was Radmeters4U dot com. Selma bought the package deal and an extra dosimeter and some extra Potassium Iodate.”

“You can get a Survey meter, a dosimeter charger, 3 dosimeters, 742’s I think, and some KIO₃ pills,” Steve explained. “All for around \$800 or so.”

“What do we need radiation equipment for?” Jack asked.

“When that quake hit, it scrambled the reactors at Diablo Canyon, Jack,” Steve said. “What do you suppose would have happened if the reactors hadn’t have scrambled?”

“Ok, I see the point, I’ll talk to Moira about it,” Jack agreed.

“Talk to me about what?” Moira asked. She was standing there holding the pitcher of iced tea to refill their glasses.

“Three Mile Island, I guess,” Jack replied.

“Sandy said something about Geiger Counters and some package deal,” Moira pointed out. “Is that what you’re talking about?”

“That’s right honey,” Jack confirmed.

“They’ll be here in a few days, Jack. I hope you don’t mind,” Moira explained. “I used Sandy’s computer and ordered it on the Internet yesterday afternoon. And I got 1 extra bottle of the pills and 2 extra NukAlert key ring things. The pills and one NukAlert are for you Randy and you can pay us back.”

“We weren’t going to talk this over?” Jack asked.

“Well, I knew you’d get to it eventually and try to talk me into it so I cut you off at the pass,” Moira laughed.

“Steve, Sandy and you working on Moira is going to put us in the poor house,” Jack said.

“Hey man, Sandy did that all on her own, leave me out of it,” Steve pleaded.

“So what are we doing to do about those homicide cases?” Jack asked.

“Hold on a minute Jack,” Steve said. “Let’s finish this discussion before we start another.”

“Randy could you use that dozer to cut a trench say maybe 34’ wide 70’ long and about 16’ deep?” Steve asked.

“Yeah, so what?” Randy said.

“You done any concrete or block work?” Steve continued.

“That’s how I got started, concrete first and then masonry,” Randy replied.

“Want something to keep you busy this summer?” Steve asked. “Free food, weekends off and no rent or taxes to pay. Plus free fuel and a little pocket money if you run short.”

“Whom do you want me to kill?” Randy asked seriously.

“I want you to cut the trench I described, pour footings and a slab and lay up block walls,” Steve said. “We’ll put in a 30’ by 60’ bomb shelter.”

“Bomb shelter?” Jack, Marty and Randy echoed.

“It’s about all we need to make the cabin the perfect bugout place,” Steve said.

“And how do we pay for this John D.?” Jack asked.

“Jack do you remember that job we did 2 or 3 years back where we ordered extra block and got stuck with them?” Randy asked. “We never took delivery on the block and they refused to refund the money. There’s enough block there to build that shelter with some block left over. All I have to do is arrange to have them delivered.”

“What else would you need?” Jack asked.

“Probably one or two truckloads of concrete for the footings and floor, several bags of mortar mix, some basement sealer and something to cover the overhead,” Randy explained.

"I know where you can get some of those heavy steel plates they use to cover holes in the streets," Marty pitched in.

"I have a welder who owes me big time," Randy said.

"I love it when a plan comes together," Steve smiled. "Hannibal Smith, The A-Team"

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"I'll call the detectives on Tuesday because I'll probably have more free time than the two of you," Steve suggested. "We need to stay on top of those homicides, earthquakes or not."

"You should emphasize that the deaths are related, that it was a professional hit and that he prefers to use M1A rifles," Jack stated. "You also tell them that the odds are that he works for the Agency. I'm sure that the Agency will stonewall any inquires, but maybe they can get the FBI to run some kind of computer program and see if there are any other unsolved homicides with the same MO."

"Listen to him, would you," Marty laughed. "He even almost *sounds* like a Deputy Sheriff."

Jack had to admit to himself that he was a bit of an anachronism. At age 52 many of the senior deputies had 25 years in on the job and were beginning to think about retirement. Yet, here he was age 52 and a rookie. He was the biggest rookie in the Department, but that wasn't much consolation. And, to top it off, Sheriff Penrod was way outside of policy on his being a Deputy. If it weren't for the current emergency he'd be a Reserve Deputy or maybe even not that. The earthquake took care of Moira's new job and they'd delved a little further into their savings than prudent trying to get prepared. Then Moira had ordered those Geiger Counters, spending the extra money he'd picked up in the last couple of weeks. He'd figured that money would replenish the savings account a little. Lost in his mental ramblings, he didn't notice the Sergeant pull in.

"Hey Sergeant," Steve said, "What brings you up here on a Sunday? They cancel the weekend off?"

"Nothing like that, Steve," Sergeant said. "No, you fellas enjoy the time off. However, instead of reporting to Twin Pines on Tuesday you check in at the Central Station and pick up travel vouchers and cash advances for a trip down to San Diego."

"How long are we going to be down there?" Marty asked.

"Marty, you'd better pack for a couple of weeks," Sergeant suggested. "The CNG is overwhelmed and even having extra troops in from other states isn't really helping the SDPD. They have a backlog of cases to deal with and several agencies are sending in a few folks."

“But why us, Sergeant?” Steve asked. “I’m a Paramedic, Marty’s Patrol and Jack’s just a rookie. Sorry Jack.”

“Partly I suppose because you 3 guys have your act together,” Sergeant said. “Look at you. While most everyone else in the Department is trying to put their lives back together, you 3 Musketeers are up here in the mountains kicked back enjoying life.”

“So we’re going to be penalized because 2 of us bought into a housing tract that the builder actually built the houses to withstand the BIG ONE and we spent about every dime we had getting prepared?” Steve said. “That doesn’t seem right.”

“Well, it will be 16-hour days for the entire time and that will help replenish your savings,” Sergeant said. “But if you’d rather, I can talk to the Commander about sending someone else.”

“Don’t be hasty Sergeant,” Jack jumped in. “Right about now I could use some extra money. Moira is out of work, again, and we just bought some more survival equipment so I need to replenish my savings.”

“Yeah, Steve,” Marty said. “Our house didn’t get much damage, so it doesn’t rise to the level of the deductible of the earthquake insurance and I need some extra money to make the repairs. Another couple of weeks of overtime would just about cover it.”

“I was thinking about putting in that expandable communications tower, wasn’t I,” Steve announced. “Two weeks of additional overtime would go a ways towards covering it. Well, ok by me.”

“Want some iced tea, anyone?” Sandy asked bringing the pitcher and Sergeant a glass.

“I’d rather have a cold beer,” Sergeant laughed, “But, I’ve got eleven years now and it wouldn’t do to slip. You’re looking a lot better these days, Marty. Make a change in your life?”

Marty didn’t reply but he had a peculiar look on his face and when he looked at Sergeant there was that look of recognition that sometimes passes between members of the organization he’d recently joined. “Maybe,” he thought, “This will work out ok. I don’t seem to be alone in this deal. Jack understands and so does Sergeant. They’re just going to have to find someone else to sing in the Choir.” (The Choirboys, Joseph Wambaugh)

Big John – Chapter 10 – San Diego

California's second largest city and the United States' seventh largest, San Diego boasts a citywide population of nearly 1.3 million residents and more than 2.8 million residents countywide. Within its borders of 4,200 sq. miles, San Diego County encompasses 18 incorporated cities and numerous other charming neighborhoods and communities, including downtown's historic Gaslamp Quarter, Little Italy, Coronado, La Jolla, Del Mar, Carlsbad, Escondido, La Mesa, Hillcrest, Barrio Logan, Chula Vista and more.

Known for its near-idyllic climate, 70 miles of pristine beaches and dazzling array of world-class family attractions, including the world-famous San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park, SeaWorld San Diego and LEGOLAND California, San Diego offers a wide variety of things to see and do, appealing to guests from around the world.

In San Diego's East County, the terrain varies from gentle foothills to mile-high mountains and the historic mining town, Julian, down to the 600,000-acre Anza Borrego Desert State Park, offering nature-conscious visitors endless opportunities to hike, camp, fish, observe wildlife and much more. In San Diego's North County, the land produces quantities of flowers as well as quality grapes that become excellent wines, which are served at some of the most elegant restaurants and resorts in the region. Along the west, 70 miles of Pacific Ocean coastline not only supports year-round outdoor recreation, such as surfing, boating, sailing and swimming, but also important scientific research at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. To the south, it's a whole different country, Mexico, featuring its own cultural offerings in various towns along the border and coastline, including Tijuana, Rosarito and Ensenada.

The city of San Diego lies in the southwest corner of California, 120 miles (193 km) south of the city of Los Angeles and 20 miles (32 km) north of Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. Elevation ranges from sea level to 1,591 feet in the city, to 6,500 feet in the county. At the moment, the description of San Diego was incorrect. Just reduce the elevation of everything by about 50' and it would be a lot more accurate. The Chief of the SDPD was William M. Lansdowne. He was sworn in as San Diego's Chief of Police on August 4, 2003 and reported directly to the City Manager. San Diego was divided into 8 policing divisions.

The large presence of the US Navy in San Diego and the Marines at Pendleton and Twentynine Palms meant that even though the CNG was overwhelmed, there was sufficient military presence in the area. What was needed was to solve crimes of a more conventional nature than looting and crimes that came with disasters. Normally a city with a relatively reasonable crime rate, in short time immediately following the disaster San Diego had experienced a brief upsurge in crime. There were statements to take and leads to follow and Lansdowne had finally asked for help to let them get caught up.

Tuesday morning the fellas all got their things around and after warm goodbyes, headed to Central Station. While Marty and Jack took care of the paperwork, vouchers and ad-

vances, Steve stopped and had more than a few words with the detectives. The Sheriff had merged the two investigations, but one team of detectives had been dropped because little headway was being made. The remaining detectives weren't too sure about contacting the CIA, but one of them knew someone in the FBI, she said, and it was worth a call. Steve joined up with Jack and Marty, signed his paperwork and they headed towards San Diego on I-15.

The SDPD was temporarily being run out of the Northeastern Division and the fellas drove to San Diego, checked into the motel and then went to the temporary headquarters to get their assignments. It was decided by the powers to be that the 3 San Bernardino Deputies would work as a team canvassing the neighborhood of a particularly nasty crime, a fatal shooting that San Diego detectives were labeling as an assassination.

The report on the incident waived a large RED flag. A Lt. Commander in the Navy had been killed the day after the earthquake, May 17th, while he was returning home after being on duty for nearly 24 hours. The officer lived in housing at Miramar NAS with his wife and 2 kids. According to the file, the wife didn't know any reason why someone might have killed her husband. He had been working on some hush-hush project but was pulled off when the earthquake hit. She didn't have any details and the Navy was stonewalling. NCIS (NIS became NCIS in 1992) was handling the investigation for the military and they weren't sharing with the SDPD. The Navy had claimed the body immediately and refused to share the autopsy report. But, a note in the file indicated that a rifle, probably .30-caliber, had killed the officer. It had been a single shot from about 100-yards according to the report. The detectives had located the probable location the shooter had used, but there was no forensic evidence that give them any clue as to the identity of the shooter.

"I wonder if there is any link between the Lt. Commander and those two people who were killed on Lytle Creek Road," Jack wondered aloud.

"A lot of the facts seem to fit, Jack," Steve observed. "The thing is who would do a hit one day after a major disaster?"

"I don't know, Steve," Jack replied. "Maybe someone with an assignment that couldn't wait. If we can tie this shooting into the shooting in Lytle Creek Road, we'll know for sure, won't we?"

"I don't see what good it's going to do for us to go door-to-door," Marty suggested. "If you guys are right, it's likely nobody saw the shooter."

"Marty, this guy is sloppy," Jack pointed out. "There is no way we should have gotten those two shell casings on Lytle Creek Road. At least, not if I'm right and the shooter is a professional."

"Let's do the door-to-door and see if anyone saw anything," Steve suggested.

It was just like in the movies, if you think about it. After pounding on more doors than they could count, Marty ran into an elderly gentleman who'd been, are you ready for this, walking his dog. The old guy, Mr. Summers, had taken the dog out just before dark to walk it for the evening. Mr. Summers wasn't about to break curfew, he'd been in the big one, you know, and he was wearing his VFW hat. Summers had seen a man walking back to a vehicle carrying a rifle in his right hand. Summers insisted that you carried a rifle in the hand that went on the fore stock of the weapon and that meant the man was left-handed. That's the way they'd done in the Battle of the Bulge.

The man, Summers had said, was average, maybe 6' tall, brown hair, wearing a crew cut and no cap. He was dressed just like everyone else and had put the rifle in a gun case in the back and had taken off in that rented vehicle from Hertz. It was one of those new-fangled SUV things, a Lincoln Navigator. No, he couldn't remember anything else about the man that would distinguish him from a thousand other guys. Walked like a military man, if that was any help. Marty gave Mr. Summer a card from one of the San Diego detectives, and continued to canvass. That's it, that's all they got. But, it was a lot. How many people could have rented a Lincoln Navigator from Hertz in and around the time of the earthquake?

They fed the information to the San Diego detectives and Steve called the detectives up in San Bernardino with the additional information. Some phone service had obviously been restored. The detectives in San Bernardino were still waiting for the results back from the FBI who had agreed to perform the search they'd requested. They told Steve that they'd contact Hertz and see what they could find out about Lincoln Navigator rentals during the time immediately before and after the earthquake. Hertz kept all of their records in a central databank, so it shouldn't be too difficult. And, if Hertz wouldn't cooperate, they probably had enough to get a warrant to look themselves.

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"You were sloppy again," the man with the smoke said.

"I didn't leave any forensic evidence at the scene," the quiet man said.

"No, but you were seen this time."

"Seen by who?"

"It's whom and the observer was an old guy named Summers who was out walking his dog and saw you putting your tools away. I've taken care of Mr. Summers. You are going to have to go to ground and hope this all blows over. San Bernardino Sheriff's detectives put a request in to the FBI to search your MO, too. My reach isn't far enough to block that search. The SDPD is short of help and San Bernardino sent 3 people down to help them out. Care to guess who they sent?"

"The big guy and the guy he was with?" the quiet man asked.

“Yes and the big guy’s Training Officer. That big guy was in the military police and almost in the CID. He worked for a number of years as the head of security for a construction company and then somehow ended up with the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department. His name is Jack Douglas, his Training Officer is Marty Wilson and the other guy is Steve Barranca, he’s a Paramedic. Here are their files. You’d better learn about who you’re up against.”

“Do you want me to take them out?” the quiet man asked.

“And draw more attention to yourself? Not hardly. You lay low for now. We can’t have any of this being tied to the higher ups,” the smoker replied. (I know him; he’s on the X-Files.)

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Wednesday morning, June 1, 2005...

“Hey Jack, look at this,” Steve said.

“What do you have?” Jack asked taking the paper.

“That guy that Marty interviewed, Mr. Summers?” Steve explained, “Got hit by a car last night and killed. Hit and Run.”

“Every time we get a little closer to this killer, we lose our witness,” Jack observed. “I wonder when the guy is going to start coming after us?”

“Or our wives,” Steve said.

“Can you get in touch with Sandy?” Jack asked.

“I should be able to, I’ll go through to San Bernardino Sheriff’s detectives,” Steve replied.

“Call her and have Selma, the kids, Moira and her get up to the cabin,” Jack suggested, sounding worried. “Then, call Randy and see how he is coming with the project.”

“Jack, it has only been 2 days,” Steve said, “He couldn’t be too far along.”

“You don’t know Randy when he gets a bug up his butt,” Jack said. “If I know Randy half as well as I think I do, he got some architect in to draw up a set of plans while he was excavating. Pro bono, of course. Then, he got a crew in today and they put in the plumbing and this afternoon will be pouring the concrete slab. By tomorrow, he’ll have a crew in putting in the concrete block and someone setting the plumbing fixtures. On

second thought, don't call Randy, there will be a lot of people at the cabin and the ladies will be safe enough."

"But we didn't leave money to buy the mortar for the blocks or the steel plates, I mentioned," Marty butted in.

"By Friday night, that bomb shelter of yours will be done, Steve," Jack laughed. "Or, will it take more than having it covered over and that 12kw China generator moved into the shelter along with that 300-gallon tank to finish the place up?"

"We're going to need a blast door from Utah Shelter Systems and I really wanted to put in a LUWA system, eventually," Steve replied.

"What is a LUWA system," Jack asked.

"The Swiss built LUWA system is a combination chemical and biological filter, air pump and blast valve," Steve responded. "It can be hand operated or will run on a 120 volt system. It costs approximately \$5,200. It has been carefully tested in special testing facilities, and is highly recommended for use in a shelter for protection against nuclear blast and radiation. Maybe we can't afford it."

"How much are you figuring on each of us contributing to the cost of the shelter?" Marty asked.

"Over time, about \$3,000 per family," Steve said a little softly.

"\$3,000?" Marty said. "Where in the hell am I going to get that kind of money?"

"I said over time, Marty," Steve responded. "How much a year did you spend on drinking?"

"Gee, maybe a couple of hundred a month," Marty replied.

"Plus peanuts and chips and all of the crap you probably ate to go with the booze," Jack said. "You can pay us back in one year, Marty at \$250 a month. Anyway, what about the blast door, Steve?"

"I'll have Sandy order the LUWA and blast door before she goes up the mountain," Steve replied. "We can front the purchase and you can pay your share as soon as you get the money."

"With this overtime, I'll be able to pay my share right away," Jack said. "I can start saving later. Marty are you okay with this?"

"Yeah, count me in," Marty said.

“Well, if we’re going to pay for a bomb shelter, we’d better get to work and earn that overtime, fellas,” Jack announced.

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“I don’t know Moira,” Sandy replied. “Steve just said that Selma and the kids, you and I were to get up to the cabin. He had me order a blast door and LUWA system for the shelter too. Maybe Russia is going to attack, he didn’t say. I know Jack and Marty are involved in the decision somehow. And Steve said that we were to arm ourselves and start carrying 24/7.”

“I wonder what they’ve gotten themselves into now.” Moira mused.

This was hell of a time to be building a shelter, AFTER the BIG ONE. However, in January of 2005, China announced that it was securing its delivery routes between the Middle East and its homeports. This meant that the Chinese fleet would be out in the oceans of the world, whatever that might mean. And, China had announced that it was siding with Iran on the question of possible Iranian nuclear weapons, whatever that might mean. Did that mean trouble with a capital “T”? China was no doubt backing North Korea, also.

Jack, Steve and Marty had started their 2-week tour in San Diego with their most high profile case. After discovering the link between the murder of the Lt. Commander and the man and woman on Lytle Creek Road, everything else they did for the 2-week period was routine and/or mundane. They managed to clear 6 cases for the SDPD and were very happy when Saturday, June 11th came. They checked out of the motel just after noon and headed straight for the cabin. When they got there, it almost appeared as if nothing had changed.

It wasn’t until Randy showed them the entrance to the new shelter that they became impressed. USS sells two types of doors, their own and the blast door made by the Swiss. Sandy had elected to go with the LUWA armored blast door manufactured by the Swiss. It had taken a while for the LUWA door and LUWA ventilation to get there and Randy had the ventilation system installed. The LUWA door was only half installed because the concrete around the door frame had to set for 30 days before they could hang the door. Randy had gotten the plans for the USS blast door from USS and Moira had spent the \$350 on the materials. The walls were filled with concrete, the ¾” plate laid and welded and 6” of concrete had gone over that. Then, Randy tarred it all and had backfilled and compacted the earth as he went. He also had the septic system expanded to accommodate the new shelter and the water plumbed from the well to the shelter. The 300-gallon tank and China generator had gone into the shelter along with the freezer from the cabin before they closed the lid and poured the concrete. There was a winch that would allow them to lower things down from the outer blast door to the Armored blast door and wheel them into the shelter. The shelter had all of the basic equipment; all it was missing was furnishings. And all the 3 families lacked to get the furnishings was money.

Once Jack paid Steve back, Steve turned right around and put in the collapsible antenna mast. Everything had turned out to have been timed about right because when the shelter was finished, the several contractor friends of Randy's had gotten very busy rebuilding the Inland Empire, again. Even if there weren't enough new construction jobs to go around, there were always the earthquake repairs to keep contractors busy. The elimination of the roadblocks by the federal government had resolved the problem with transporting goods. Then the earthquake turned around and exacerbated the problem a second time.

They got home on Saturday evening, Jack paid Steve on Sunday and Steve had Sandy order the radio tower while he was at work on Monday. The men were finally at their assigned station at Twin Peaks, but they weren't staying at their homes; everyone was staying at the cabin. And that even included Marty and his family because while Marty hadn't been a part of the Lytle Creek Road investigation, he'd gotten pretty well involved when they were down in San Diego. The San Bernardino Sheriff's detectives had finally gotten the information from the FBI and it appeared that there were nearly 2 dozen unsolved murders related to the individual who preferred, but didn't always use, the 7.62x51mm rifle. The death of the gun storeowner had been one of 3 cases where the individual had used a handgun.

For all they knew about the individual involved, they didn't learn any more from the FBI search other than he was responsible for several more deaths. The 3 Deputies had no clue what linked all of the killings though there was a link. The link between the gun storeowner and the double homicide on Lytle Creek Road was obvious, elimination of an eyewitness. The same applied to Mr. Summer down in San Diego, but his murder hadn't fit the pattern of the killer they were seeking. The detectives had been forced to discontinue work on the case as other cases took precedence. To top everything off, the Sheriff was forced to revert Jack from a full time Deputy to a Reserve Deputy by the Civil Service Commission or someone.

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Moir's store reopened and she went back to work. Sandy's office notified her that they were shutting down the office and moving to another city. Sandy got a new job with a Pomona Law Firm doing the same as she'd done before, answering the phones. The antenna tower got put in and the shelter furnished and by time it came for school to start back up, everyone was back in their homes. Jack got a very good job working for a retailer as director of security and he and Moira began to rebuild their savings.

"How's it going on the new job, Jack?" Steve asked.

"Pays better than either Randy or the Sheriff's Department," Jack replied. "It was nice of Penrod to let me stay on as a Reserve Deputy."

“Considering what we’ve been through since the first of the year, you are more than qualified to be a Reserve Deputy,” Steve answered.

“Hear any more about those homicides?” Jack inquired.

“That trail is colder than a well digger’s butt,” Steve said.

“How’s Marty holding up with AA?” Jack asked.

“Got a six-month chip and working on nine,” Steve said. “He’s never missed a payment on the shelter either.”

“Randy says that he and the redhead are getting married,” Jack smiled.

“I thought he claimed last spring she was dumb,” Steve said.

“He did, but maybe that’s the way he wants the next one,” Jack said. “That ex-wife of his was pretty darned smart, you know.”

“Didn’t know her, Jack,” Steve said. “So did she end up getting screwed when Randy dumped the business on her?”

“In a manner of speaking,” Jack chuckled. “When she found out what kind of condition the business was in, she started talking to another contractor about merging the firms. They ended up getting married, does that answer your question?”

“A sort of multiple merger, huh?” Steve chuckled too.

“Well, I heard around that she’s trying to get the new hubby to adopt the kids,” Jack explained. “That marriage won’t last too long. I’d give it about another year and a half.”

“That’s cold, Jack.” Steve said.

“They don’t call her the Ice Queen for nothing, partner,” Jack revealed. “This is husband number 3.”

“How old is she?” Steve inquired.

“I’d say that Lynn is about 35,” Jack replied.

“But, Randy is closer to 50,” Steve pointed out.

“Same age as I am, Steve, but he likes them young and chesty,” Jack related.

“Have you seen the redhead?” Steve asked.

“Looks like Loni Anderson with red hair,” Jack replied.

“We’d better get the bunk beds loaded and up to the cabin,” Steve suggested. “It doesn’t look like Marty is going to show up.”

◦

The shelter was 30’ wide and 60’ long, about the size of the average home or maybe a little smaller. It was intended to house Jack and Moira, Steve and Sandy, Marty, Selma Sissy and Junior plus Randy Jenkins and the redhead (Belinda), assuming they got married. Ten people in 1,800 square feet weren’t particularly crowded. Jack had moved his gun safe to the shelter and they winched it down and used it as combined storage for their guns. He still had his old gun cabinets. Steve had contributed the antenna mast and the antennas and they had cables that went from the mast to the shelter and back out to the cabin. Marty and Selma had been to lots of garage sales and added what they could afford, mostly kitchen stuff. They had 2 6’ folding tables and a dozen folding chairs for the dining area which also doubled as the dayroom. They had the old TV that Jack had kept when he’d gotten the big screen LCD TV. About $\frac{2}{3}$ of their ammo was stored in the shelter and the remainder at their homes.

Marty had come dragging in just before Jack and Steve left for the cabin and the 3 of them got the bunk beds set up in the shelter. There were 5 small bedrooms, all with just enough room for a bunk bed and dresser. There was a single bathroom with a sink, shower and stool. The kitchen had a counter with a built in sink and cabinets below and above. Behind the kitchen was a storeroom where Steve and Jack had packed all of their long-term food. It wasn’t fancy, but it sure was functional. There was a 30”x60” used office table where they could set up Jack’s radios, assuming they ever had to use the shelter. It was about 20 miles from Marty’s house to the housing tract where Steve and Jack lived, but Marty and Selma also had a basement.

Marty and Selma had picked up enough used twin sets at garage sales that there were 2 sets of bedding for each of the beds. The guys tossed the bedding and mattress pads on the lower bunks for the girls to make up if they ever needed to use the shelter. Marty had a lot more money these days and when they couldn’t find pillows at garage sales, Selma and he bought inexpensive ones for each of the beds. There was 8 years’ worth of food for one individual in the storage room and Jack and Moira had their 34-month supply in their basement and Steve and Sandy had their 24-month supply. Given even a little time to load up and move, they could equip the shelter with more than enough food for all them for a year plus 5,000-gallons of propane on Jack’s propane trailer and a 30kw and a 12kw generator. The residential standby generators weren’t exactly portable, weighing in around 600 pounds, but they could be moved.

What was the point to all of the preparations, one might ask. They had those terrorist attacks back on Valentine’s Day and then on May 16th, the world started to fall apart. There were several reasons for the continued preparations. In the first place the FBI had never caught the terrorists so they could always strike again. One alternate theory

that was making its way around in some circles suggested that it hadn't been terrorists at all. This theory held the Dubya was behind the whole thing. It was one of the more popular conspiracy theories at the moment. The theory went that Dubya had bombed several locations around the US in an effort to force Congress to adopt the National Identity Cards (NIC's). There were always conspiracy theorists around; these guys were still looking for the flying saucer from Roswell but never thought to look in Palmdale. Then again, as the saying goes, *just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean that they're not out to get you.*

That might be all well and good, but surely good old Dubya hadn't caused that earthquake that caused the subduction zone to slip and trigger other quakes around the county. Besides, Congress had given everyone until January 2, 2006 to get his or her NIC. Bad things come in threes the old folk saying goes. Princess Diana, John Denver, and Sony Bono; Princess, Singer, Actor/Congressman. They wouldn't be old folk tales if there weren't some truth in them, now would they? An old folk tale isn't the same thing as an urban legend. It wasn't a question of if something bad were going to happen; it was a question of when that bad thing would happen. And if it happened in close proximity to the other events, the old folks would just say, "See, I told you, bad things come in threes."

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"See, it all blew over," the man said as he lit another cigarette.

"Maybe, from what you told me earlier, they pretty much know which jobs I've done."

"So, change your MO."

"A fella sort of gets used to doing things a certain way, you know?"

"That's up to you. We have another assignment. You'll like this one."

"I thought we'd gotten rid of everyone on that project."

"We have, you saw to that. But, there's another bit of information that is beginning to leak and we can't have that, now can we?"

"Hey, these are pretty high profile people, they're going to be hard to do."

"Then use a different approach. Take them all out at once."

"Any suggestion on how I can accomplish that?"

"Call this number. The guy's name is Boris, believe it or not. He might give you some ideas."

“I recognize the name, he’s Russian Mafia.”

“That’s correct. Not all of the missing items went to the terrorists. His group was the intermediary in most of that business. They got greedy and ended up with some excess inventory. I think that you’ll find that all of the subjects will be in one particular place at one particular time, if you compare their schedules. It’s all outlined in the documents.”

“There could be some collateral damage if I take your approach.”

“Nobody important, I assure you.”

“Wait a minute. It says here that they’ll all be at the Pantages Theatre for the opening of that new show. The Pantages is located on the north side of Hollywood Blvd., just east of the northeast corner of Hollywood & Vine. That’s a pretty high profile location.”

“Use the timer; you have 12 hours to clear the area. There won’t be any security.”

“Why do I get the feeling that this one is going to come back and bite me on the butt?”

I guess all you need to know is the date, huh? That would be telling.

Big John – Chapter 11 – Tick, Tick, Tick

Saturday, September 3, 2005...

This was Labor Day weekend and the Pantages didn't have anything opening this week or next. During the 3 months of summer, the couples frequently went to the cabin as a group. This was one such weekend and possibly the last for a while. Three months of scrimping and saving had all three families to the point that they didn't need to wait until the next paycheck to buy groceries or things they needed. The men had continued to make minor improvements in the area of the cabin including pouring a small slab for the RS 30000 in the event it would somehow be needed at the cabin. The cabin's primary source of power, as you may recall, was electrical solar panels. It had been decided that in the event of that emergency that they all hoped would never happen, Steve's RS 12000 would be moved to the small soundproof room that housed the China 12kw generator. They'd use the Onan as a principal source of power if the solar panels proved for any reason to be insufficient. And the China generator could back up the Onan.

Jack and Steve had moved major portions of their gun collections up to the gun safe in the shelter. They had gotten Randy's welder friend to add a hasp arrangement so they could lock the shelter from the outside or remove the hasp while they were inside. The same padlock was used for both purposes. It was a simple arrangement that didn't require an engineering degree to install. It would keep would be intruders out of the shelter, making it safe to store valuables, like the firearms, in the shelter. Jack had been allowed to keep the Beretta because he was a Reserve Deputy, but he had replaced Moira's handgun with a Glock model 22 with 15 round magazines. They still carried, but Sandy, Selma and Moira had gotten those purses, designed to carry concealed, to carry their handguns. The men had added a folding knife to the purses in case the ladies couldn't get to their BOB's.

BOB's had also been prepared for Sissy and Junior, but the weapons of all descriptions had to be left at home because of school rules. The BOB's had the usual assortment one generally finds in such an arrangement including 3 packs of water, one lifeboat ration, a Leatherman (left at home) a small fishing kit, matches, firestarter, GPS with local maps loaded and so forth. The adult BOB's differed only in that the Leatherman was in the BOB and it contained the 3rd and 4th magazines for the pistols. They also contained the handy talkies and were never far from reach.

They painted the inside of the shelter with that white sealer and it filled most of the pockets/pits in the concrete block walls. Randy and Belinda had eloped to Vegas and came back Mr. and Mrs. during July. They had a home in Pomona too. Randy and taken a position with a contractor friend of his as a site manager. The ladies had made the beds after a few choice words directed at the 3 husbands and the shelter was ready to be occupied at a moment's notice. Randy, of course had seen the LUWA door hung and verified that it sealed the shelter tight. They had also used some of the money Marty was repaying to buy a stacking washer and electric dryer for the shelter.

When their schedules permitted Sandy and Steve, Moira and Jack went to the range to keep their shooting skills finely honed. On occasion, Marty and Selma joined them at the range. Sandy had added a set of topo maps to her computer and was able to interface it with her GPS. She had 2 extra batteries for the computer and a solar charger that could be used to recharge the batteries. They had an absolutely great time over the weekend and even talked about doing Thanksgiving there. Sandy had gone up to the cabin early, emptied out the freezer and they had taken all new frozen goods to the mountains. She left enough meat in the refrigerator to thaw out and feed them for the 3 days they planned to be there. Being around other people who were drinking a beer no longer bothered Marty and Steve and Jack were able to enjoy a beer without worrying about him.

Stopping drinking, a very good record as a Training Officer and other things had added up to Marty picking up another stripe on his sleeve. He was feeling good and good about himself. Each day became a little easier for Marty. He had stopped sooner than anyone had known, too. Did it strike you a bit odd when Steve commented that Marty had a 6-month chip and was working on nine? If Marty had really stopped in May, he wouldn't have a 6-month chip until November. Sergeant knew, but couldn't and wouldn't say. Marty had started much sooner and his 'sobriety date' started when he'd quit drinking, not when he'd accepted his problem and declare himself to be a new member of an organization. The truth that might or might not eventually come out was that way back in January, Selma had given Marty an ultimatum. The thing was, it wasn't anybody's business but Marty's. And, if Jack caught it, which he may not have, it wasn't his concern. It actually takes a while for some of the physical symptoms to begin to fade.

All the references so far have been rather vague as to the professional killer's employer. Jack had repeatedly suggested the Agency aka CIA. Jack could be wrong. Jack is, but it won't come out for a long time that it isn't the CIA, if it ever comes out. In Japan, there are several powerful organizations that run the country. In the world, there is one central organization going back a fairly long time that runs everything, The Round Table. The Trilateral Commission is one of the many branches of The Round Table. Allegations have been made that G. H. W. Bush belongs. For sure the former Speaker of the House belongs, he's the current Chairman, Thomas S. Foley. Other influential members include Henry Kissinger, Paul Volker, David Rockefeller, and Zbigniew Brzezinski. The Round Table is behind the Rhodes Scholarships, and a recent President was a Rhodes scholar, William Jefferson Clinton.

Who do you think was making the decisions here?

As a result of their secret meetings at the Hotel Majestic, The Royal Institute of International Affairs was founded in London in 1920, the Council on Foreign Relations followed in 1921, and then came the Bilderberg Group (1954), the Club of Rome (1968) and the Trilateral Commission (1973). The Rothschilds and Rockefellers, and major manipulators like Henry Kissinger, who, in turn, answer to higher powers in the Illuminati, dominate these.

These organizations have among their number the top people in global politics, business, banking, military, media, “education” and so forth. These are the channels through which the same global policies are coordinated outside of public knowledge through apparently unconnected countries, political parties, and institutions. The upper levels of secret societies like the Freemasons, Knights of Malta, etc., connect into this Round Table web also.

“I think they are going to have a fulltime legal secretarial positioning opening up fairly soon,” Sandy announced. “It will be nice to get back to secretarial work and off that darned switchboard.”

“We lost our busybody Department Manager,” Moira mentioned. “There’s a chance I could get her job and that would be a major promotion for me.”

“It sounds like the two of you are coming up in the world,” Selma praised.

“I could be,” Moira said. “They promote Managers from Assistant Manager ranks and if our Assistant Manager got promoted, I’d be likely to move into her job. From Assistant Manager, I’d be able to move to a Store Manager position in 3-4 years. Assistance Managers get a ½% bonus of the store profits and Managers get anywhere from 1½% to 2½%.”

“You go, girl,” Sandy applauded.

“Jack might get a promotion too,” Moira went on.

“Do tell,” Sandy wanted to know.

“It’s too early to know for sure but he may move from Director of Store Security to Director of Regional Store Security,” Moira announced.

“So, when are you moving?” Selma asked.

“We won’t have to Selma, it’s not that big of an organization.” Moira replied. “And, even if I got a store someday, it would be somewhere I could commute to. Tell Marty congratulations on the promotion.”

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“I need another meet,” the quiet man announced.

“Is there a problem?” the smoker asked.

“Yes.”

“Two hours from now at the usual place.”

Two hours later at an undisclosed location...

“What is the problem?” the smoker lit another smoke.

“He wants \$200 million for the device. Anyway, I’d rather not use it, it’s not my style.”

“Your style is whatever I say it is. Do you have a better plan?”

“He has VX, Sarin and Soman available.”

“That sounds risky, how can you be certain to get everyone?”

“Could you arrange for them to travel to the performance in say, 2 groups?”

“Easily accomplished, what do you have in mind?”

“A couple of specially modified stretch limos and VX. It would be much cheaper and would eliminate the collateral damage. You know how I feel about collateral damage.”

“You’ll need help.”

“I’ll take care of it. Do I have your blessing?”

“Proceed. This had better work. If it doesn’t, you’ll be held responsible.”

“It will work, but this will be my last job. I’m retiring.”

“We’ll see...”

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Of the 3 nerve agents the man had mentioned, VX was the hardest to work with because it had the lowest volatility. It was also the most deadly. The quiet man took his advance funds and purchased 2 stretch limos and had them modified. The panels separating the driver from the passengers were removed and replaced with panels that were vapor-proof. All possible passages between the passenger compartments and the driver’s compartments were sealed. Remote controlled childproof locks were installed in the doors requiring someone to open the door from the vehicles’ exteriors. Two bottles of VX gas were secured and installed in the vehicles with a remote controlled release valve and a heater to help the VX become a vapor. A second man was recruited, a professional with a minor reputation. He was getting \$25,000 to chauffeur a group of people and at the appropriate moment to throw a switch. VX gas is colorless, odorless and tasteless in vapor form.

The plan was simple. The two men would pick up the intended victims to take them to the Pantages. The smoker had arranged this. When the last passenger had boarded, the switch would be flipped, engaging the remote controlled childproof locks and starting the heater on the VX container. Two minutes later the valve on the bottle would automatically open. The vehicles would be abandoned at a remote location with the passengers still inside. The two men would meet and the hired assistant would receive the second half of his money. The theatergoers would miss the performance and the quiet man would be long gone.

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Nothing could be going better, Moira had gotten the promotion and so had Jack. Marty was already studying for the Sergeant's exam. Sandy had gotten the job as a legal secretary for one of the partners of her firm. Martial law had been un-imposed for some time in the areas where the cleanup and rebuilding was progressing nicely. News of the scope of the disaster up north was becoming available for the first time and it wasn't good. The loss of life was around 75,000 as a direct result of the series of quakes and tsunami, and the aftermath was still being calculated. Scientists were warning of possible major quakes on the New Madrid Fault and others were suggesting that Yellowstone might blow its top 100,000-years early.

There had been confrontations between American Fleets and Chinese Fleets in the South China Sea, Pacific and Indian Oceans. These were much in the character of the interactions between the Russians and Americans in the Med during the Cold War. The world slowly teetered closer to WW III, as arrangements were not forthcoming with the North Koreans or Iranians. The new tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean would to be completed by July 1, 2006. The earthquake insurance pool was exhausted and Congress voted another \$5 Billion to bail it out. Totally different versions of a massive Gun Registration and Gun Control Act were being hotly contested in each body of Congress and Bush was saying that he didn't know if he'd sign either version.

A special one-night performance of Phantom of the Opera was scheduled for the Pantages Theatre for the evening of Saturday, October 1, 2005. This performance was by invitation only, e.g., you had to be invited to buy tickets, and many of Hollywood's luminaries would be in attendance. One lucky group of people was being provided complementary limousine service and they were very excited because many of them had never seen the show or had the chance to rub elbows with so many famous people all in one place. Two limousines were being employed and they were being treated to dinner after the show as part of a promotional campaign of the new limousine service. Hell, even Marty was close to taking his 9-month chip. Life was good and getting better.

Some of the couples gathered in the homes of others to make it easier on all of them. They lived off the beaten path and they didn't want to be late for the show and the dinner afterward. These were big limos holding 6 couples per car. Some of the targets were the husbands and some were the wives. The targets all had one thing in common, a project they had previously worked on. They were computer programmers, all of them.

They had been in the final testing stages of the new government software when the BIG ONE hit, delaying completion of the project until August. Most had moved on to other jobs in the private sector.

The limos picked the people up beginning around 5pm. Sitters had been arranged for the children and some of the folks had gathered early for cocktails. The limos arrived and picked them up. Many of the ladies had new dresses just for this very special occasion. The windows in the backs of the limo were very heavily tinted and an outsider couldn't look in. Shortly after picking the last couple up, each driver threw the switch. Like all nerve agents, VX disrupts the transmission of communications between nerve cells. Symptoms of exposure include increased heart rate and salivation, nausea, and vomiting. A fatal dose of VX causes convulsions, respiratory paralysis, and death within several minutes. Since VX and sarin are both nerve agents, they have similar effects on the body. But VX is about a hundred times more deadly than sarin when absorbed through the skin and about twice as deadly when inhaled. Moreover, sarin is volatile, evaporates at about the same rate as water, and is deadliest when inhaled, while VX is oil-based, extremely adhesive, and long lasting. Which all became academic a few minutes later.

The two drivers drove the limos to a secluded area and got out of the vehicles. The hired hand was marveling how easy this contract had been.

"Easiest job I ever did," the hired hand said to the quiet man.

Pfutt, Pfutt.

"It was your last one, too," the quiet man remarked.

Later that evening when the parents didn't show up after the show and dinner, some of the sitters became worried and called the LAPD. A search for the people was started and about 3 am, a patrol car spotted the limos. The 2 patrol officers who had found the cars parked together called their Sergeant and he came out to investigate.

"Did you check inside?" the Sergeant asked.

"We were waiting for you Sergeant," one of the men replied.

"How hard is it to open a door?" the Sergeant grouched grabbing the back door of the nearest limo after putting on latex gloves.

The rear door opened easily with a puff having been slightly over pressurized by the VX gas that had continued to push its way into the passenger compartment. The Sergeant got a single large whiff and went down in a heap and began to convulse. The patrolmen realized that they had a major problem, hopped in their car and beat a hasty retreat. Moments earlier they had been standing by their car, arms crossed, watching the Ser-

geant 'demonstrate'. It made CNN within an hour and the LA Times put out a special edition, with the headline, 'Mass Murder in the Foothills'.

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"Very nicely done." The smoker commented.

"I was thinking of retiring to Bermuda."

"I don't think so," the smoker said.

Pfutt, Pfutt.

Pfutt, Pfutt.

The first pair of shots took out the contractor and the second his bodyguard who was reaching for his gun.

"Maybe not Bermuda, but somewhere where it's warm," the quiet man observed.

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"Hello?" Jack answered the phone.

"Hey partner, you remember the gun storeowner up in Running Springs?" Steve asked.

"Yeah, did something break on the case finally?" Jack asked.

"You know that Hertz lead was a dead end and they closed the investigation, right?" Steve asked.

"Yeah, what's happened now?" Jack wanted to know.

"You know that mass murder in LA on the first?" Steve asked. "The bullets in the body of the driver matched the bullets in that storeowner. But wait, it gets better. Did you catch the thing about that Corporate CEO and his bodyguard who were killed in Washington 2 days later?"

"Yes, so what?" Jack asked.

"The bullets came from the same gun," Steve replied.

"Then that adds 24 to his body count," Jack said.

"Right, Jack and nobody has a clue who he is," Steve agreed.

"I think that makes a total of 40, doesn't it?" Jack asked.

"Sounds about right," Steve replied.

"We going to the cabin this weekend?" Jack asked.

"We'd better lay in some firewood," Steve suggested. "This winter is supposed to be worse than last."

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"Marty, if Sissy and you can't agree what to watch on TV, go down to the shelter and watch the TV down there," Selma suggested.

"Mom, it's cold down there," Marty protested.

"Wear a coat and turn up the heat," Selma replied.

"Let's take down this tree before it falls down and hits the cabin," Steve suggested.

"Can we drop it the other way?" Jack asked.

"Shouldn't be a problem," Steve replied. "I'll climb up and attach a rope and we'll put a small amount of tension on it. Marty, toss me the rope."

The tree came down as it should and Jack began cutting off the branches and Steve began to cut the logs. Marty and Randy loaded the logs into one truck and the cut up branches into the other. When the pickups were full, they took them down to the cabin and unloaded the trucks, stacking the cut up branches and splitting the logs as they went. They broke for lunch and after the 4 men went back up the hill to haul two more pickup loads of logs and branches.

"I think that should hold us through the winter," Steve suggested.

"Maybe, maybe not, Jack replied. "I guess it depends on how much time we spend up here."

"Are you 4 men ready for supper?" Moira asked.

"Something smells good," Marty said.

"That's the homemade bread, Marty," Moira explained. "It's homemade bread and chili tonight. You guys get cleaned up and someone get Marty, Jr. from the shelter."

Over dinner Belinda finally admitted that Randy and she were expecting. Sissy and Marty, Jr. were sitting in front of the TV watching the news on CNN because it was the

only thing the two of them could agree on. Sissy wanted to watch VH-1 and Marty, Jr. wanted to watch the SciFi channel.

“Hey Dad,” Marty, Jr. hollered, “You guys had better catch this.”

CNN was reporting that there had been an incident in the Indian Ocean between an American Carrier Group and a smaller Chinese task group that had culminated in shots being fired and one Chinese vessel being hit. President Bush was expected to make an announcement as soon as he returned to the Oval Office from Camp David, Maryland. The military had been moved to a higher state of readiness and the Threat Level had gone to Orange.

My Fellow Americans, Bush began.

At 6am local time, 6pm here in Washington, naval forces of the People’s Republic of China engaged naval forces of the United States in the Indian Ocean. Ships attached to CVN76, the USS Ronald Reagan, our newest carrier, were initially hampered in their movements by vessels of the Chinese Navy. After several near misses, the Reagan launched F/A-18 Hornets to increase the fleet air cover. At approximately 7:15am, a 7,940-ton Sovremenny class missile destroyer, vessel 136 the Hangzhou, launched a supersonic SS-N-22 Sunburn anti-ship cruise missile against the Reagan. The Reagan launched Sparrow missiles against the Sunburn missile without avail. Eventually, the Reagan’s Phalanx Close-In Weapons System destroyed the missile launched by the Chinese Destroyer Captain.

Aircraft from the Reagan together with its escort vessels, USS Thomas S. Gates (CG 51), USS Benfold (DDG 65), USS Mitscher (DDG 57) and USS Camden (AOE 2) engaged the Hangzhou and sank the vessel, apparently with the loss of all hands. The government of the United States regrets that this action became necessary.

I have directed Secretary Chertoff to raise the Threat Level to Orange. I have directed Secretary Rice to open communications with the People’s Republic of China immediately. The United States is preparing a protest to be filed with the People’s Republic of China and the UN in the coming days.

If the People’s Republic of China wishes to join the Axis of Evil, it is their choice. President Hu Jintao kicked off an 18-month-long ideological education campaign to preserve the advanced nature of the nation’s 86 million party members upon the death of former party general secretary Zhao Ziyang in January of this year. As some of you may remember, late patriarch Deng Xiaoping’s decision to crush the student activists with tanks led to the Tiananmen Square massacre – and the ouster of the liberal Zhao.

The armed forces of the United States have been placed on DEFCON 3 status and all leaves and passes have been cancelled. Laura and I pray that further action will not be necessary as a result of the incident in the Indian Ocean today.

Thank you and good night. God Bless America.

"I knew it," Marty said. "Things were going along just too smoothly."

"So far, it's just posturing, Marty," Jack pointed out.

"These things have a way of getting out of hand, Jack," Steve warned. "The Chinese never fully resumed shipments of goods to the US after the tsunamis."

"I'm sorry, Steve," Jack replied, "But I can't believe that the People's Republic of China would take on the United States. We have them outclassed in every way. We have a bigger Navy, we have more nuclear weapons and we have a warmonger in the White House. If they were to attack the mainland US, we could wipe them out."

"But at what cost, Jack?" Steve asked. "I've seen estimates of the Chinese capacity to wage war. They must have anywhere up to 1,200 nuclear weapons themselves."

"Yeah, and Iran and North Korea may have some too," Marty added.

"Jack," Steve continued, "On May 6, 2002 United States Under Secretary of State John Bolton gave a speech entitled 'Beyond the Axis of Evil'. In it he added three more nations to be grouped with the already mentioned 'rogue states': Libya, Syria, and Cuba. The criteria for membership of this group was: 'state sponsors of terrorism that are pursuing or who have the potential to pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or have the capability to do so in violation of their treaty obligations'. The speech was widely reported as an expansion of the original Axis of Evil. The allegation of Cuban WMD capability was particularly strenuously denied by the Cuban government, and disputed by former president Jimmy Carter who visited the country a week later after being briefed by US officials."

"What's more, Jack," Steve was on a roll, "In January of this year, at the beginning of Bush's second term as President, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made a speech regarding the newly termed 'Outposts of tyranny', a list of 6 countries deemed most dangerous and anti-American. This was comprised of the two remaining Axis members, as well as Cuba, Belarus, Zimbabwe and Myanmar."

"What do the rest of you want to do?" Jack inquired.

"It couldn't hurt to start moving some of our things up here from the valley," Steve suggested. "We can take down a couple of those 90# propane bottles for the generators and move the propane tanker and half of our food up here. It would mean less stuff to move if TSHTF."

"I'll tell you what," Jack responded. "We'll go down tomorrow and move my tanker, my radio equipment and my tower and half of the supplies. We can always move those generators and the rest of the food. Will that satisfy you?"

Big John – Chapter 12 – Rising Tensions

President Bush stood at the apogee of his life Thursday (01/20/05), and he rose to the occasion. A small man (in our view), who became President through accident of birth and corruption of democracy; he has been legitimized by reelection, empowered by his party's control of all three branches of government and enlarged by history (in the form of 9/11). His second inaugural address was that of a large man indeed, eloquently weaving the big themes of his presidency and his life into a coherent philosophy and a bold vision of how he wants this country to spend the next four years.

To summarize: Having won the Cold War, the United States was on 'sabbatical.' Then, on the 'day of fire' – Sept. 11, 2001 – America learns that it is vulnerable. The 'deepest source' of our vulnerability is that 'whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny.' Therefore, 'the survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands.' Furthermore, all people are entitled to liberty because 'they bear the image of the maker of heaven and Earth.'

And 'it is the policy of the United States' to promote democracy 'in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.'

In his inaugural address, George Bush had talked about Democracy around the world. The LA Times reported, "Now that Bush has made this his goal, he will constantly be challenged on how well he's living up to it," said Robert Kagan, a leading conservative foreign policy analyst. "Take China, for example. When the President talks about 'captives in chains,' it's got to apply to China.... We're going to come up short a lot."

But Bush aides argued that the administration had challenged China and Russia publicly on their human rights records.

Vice President Dick Cheney politely admonished China's leaders during a speech in Shanghai last year, saying: Freedom "is something that successful societies, and wise leaders, have learned to embrace rather than to fear."

The question then became was China testing Bush's resolve in the incident in the Indian Ocean? In the articles cited, the biggest worry seemed to be that Bush meant every word he'd uttered in his inauguration speech. If that were the case, that might explain why he'd skipped DEFCON 4 and gone directly to DEFCON 3.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the US Strategic Air Command was placed on DEFCON 2 for the first time in history, while the rest of US military commands (with the exception of the US Air Forces in Europe) went on DEFCON 3. On 22 October 1962 SAC responded by establishing Defense Condition Three (DEFCON III), and ordered B-52s on airborne alert. Tension grew and the next day SAC declared DEFCON 2, a heightened state of alert, ready to strike targets within the Soviet Union. "DEFCON 3 – Increase in force readiness above normal readiness."

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Sunday, October 9, 2005 was spent moving propane, communications gear and supplies from the valley to the mountain. Steve's communications gear remained in the valley and they took 4, not 2, of the 90# bottles of propane to the valley. Jack wasn't convinced that Steve was right, but doing it Steve's way put them in a better position. Certain Ham radios have a fusible link. Yaesu is one, for example. All it takes to convert the radio from one with a series of bands to one with a continuous band is the proper application of a soldering pencil by a first class radio technician who knows what he's doing. It didn't take much persuading, or even that much money for that matter, for Jack to acquire a new Yaesu FT1000MPMkV. \$2,050 for the radio, plus a bit more for some accessories; he also picked up a Yaesu Quadra System Amplifier for only \$4,000 more and it wasn't the USA version after the technician got through. Hey, don't fuss, the tech tried to sell him an IC-7800 radio at only \$10,599.99, plus tax of course. The tech had seen Bush's speech. Why, you might ask is it that way with radios? Where are Icom, Yaesu and Kenwood's built? And, why build two entirely different models, one for the US and another for the rest of the world? Very smart these Japanese.

Add to that the following CBS News report, also from January of 2005:

With China and Russia preparing to hold joint military maneuvers later this year, a top Russian military officer mentioned the possibility of selling strategic supersonic Tu-22M3 bombers, known by NATO as "Backfire C," to China.

"If they've got enough money, they should buy some" of Russia's latest aircraft, Russian Air Force commander Gen. Vladimir Mikhailov said, referring to the Chinese.

In the past, Russia has refused to sell the bombers to China on the grounds that they are "too powerful." Mikhailov's statement suggested a change in Russia's position, the state-run RIA-Novosti news agency said.

Were China to acquire the Tu-22M3, armed with the latest Russian Granit (s/b Granat KH-55/A-15) cruise missiles, the bombers would be able to "threaten the Americans" in any future dispute involving Taiwan, the news agency quoted military experts as saying.

A Chinese purchase of two Tu-22M3 regiments - or up to 40 aircraft - would be enough to guarantee the destruction of a US carrier group, the agency commented.

Russian military expert Mikhail Barabanov said the only long-range bomber China currently has in its arsenal is the subsonic Tu-16.

Backfire C according to FAS has a cruising speed of 900kph, a maximum speed of 2,300kph, a ceiling of 14,000 meters, and an operational range of 7,000km. The aircraft is of the swing-wing design and can carry one to three H-22 missiles, six to ten H-15 missiles (AS-16 Kickback) and 24,000 kg of 250-9,000kg free fall bombs. And, Russia sold China 40? 'Katie bar the door, here come the 150 Indians.'

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And then Dubya threw down the gauntlet and the Chinese picked it up, twice; first, with that new 18-month program; and, second with that little incident in the Indian Ocean. Hey Hannibal, is this plan coming together? And then, there had been that letter written to the President by some CRACKPOT up in Palmdale on the 22nd of January with a copy to the LA Times. The Times published the letter.

Dear Dubya,

I'd call you George, but I have a friend named George and I wouldn't insult him by calling you the same name. I have some questions:

1. What makes you think that the rest of the world wants a Democracy? I read an article one time that said that the American experience was unique. All the other Democracies in the history of the world failed. Is that what you want for everyone, failure?

2. My kid is in the National Guard and drives one of those Abrams tanks. He's lucky; his is an old M1A1 that's better than the M1A2 or that M1A2SEP in the desert. He did his time in Korea and even went to Kosovo. He says that next you're going to send him to Iraq. Why? What do those Iraqis have that we need so bad?

3. Why are you trying to start WW III? Those Chinese are opening the seaways and buying Russian bombers. A fella once said that he didn't know what weapons they'd use to fight WW III, but he knew what they'd use to fight WW IV, CLUBS!!!

4. Would you consider stopping screwing up Social Security and spending the money on Civil Defense instead?

5. Can I take my vote back? I hate John Kerry, but at least he's a coward. You remind me of Patton, our blood and your guts.

Sincerely,

*Gary D. Olsen
Palmdale, CA*

PS – I never voted for a Democrat but you make me wish I had, almost.

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The location of the carriers was: Kitty Hawk, Pacific; Enterprise, Norfolk (in the yard); Kennedy, Mayport; Nimitz, San Diego; Eisenhower, Atlantic; Vinson, Pacific; Roosevelt, Norfolk; Lincoln, Andaman Sea; Washington, Atlantic; Stennis, Pacific; Truman, Persian Gulf; and, Reagan, Pacific. But, after the President's address, everyone made ready to

sail and they cranked up the work on the Enterprise. Usually not all of the boomers were deployed, usually. Think again, the US was at DEFCON 3.

The Chinese were angry and they were caught between a rock and a hard place. They had 2 more of the 7,940-ton Sovremenny class missile destroyers coming from the Russians, but not until 2006. Their Navy consisted of: 2 Lanzhou class Guided Missile Destroyers, 2 Guangzhou class Missile Destroyers, 1 Sovremenny class Missile Destroyer, 1 Luhai class Missile Destroyer, 2 Luhu class Missile Destroyers, 6 Luda class Missile Destroyers, 25 Frigates of various classes, 0 Aircraft Carriers, 36 type 33 (Romeo) subs including 6 sealed in caves, 19 Ming subs, 4 Songs and 4 Kilos, all diesel electric. There were 5 Han class SSN's and 1 Xia class SSBN. That was the big stuff and the main surface/subsurface combatants.

The Chinese contacted the Russians and told them to shake a leg because they needed those 2 Destroyers. Like 2 Russian Destroyers would really make a difference against the American Navy. The Russians didn't hurry; perhaps they were afraid they'd never see the money from the Chinese. Slow isn't the same as stupid. If you lose ½ of your fleet of your largest Destroyers, you don't try again. At least, not with surface combatants, you don't. The Xia carries 12 Ju Lang-1 (Ju Lang = Giant Wave, NATO code-name: CSS-N-3) or modified JL-1A SLBMs. The missile uses inertial guidance to a maximum range of 2,150km, and carries one single 250kT nuclear warhead.

The Han's were attack boats, reportedly capable of firing the submarine-launched variant of the YJ-8 (C-801) from its 533mm torpedo tubes. The missile used active radar homing and was powered by a solid rocket engine (with a solid rocket booster). The anti-ship missile had a range of 42 km and approached the target in sea skimming mode at a speed of 0.9 Mach. The 165 kg shaped charge warhead had time delayed impact proximity fuses. The Han had six 533mm torpedo tubes, and carried a total of 20 torpedoes including Yu-3 (SET-65E)(active/passive homing to 15 km at 40 kt; warhead 205 kg) and Yu-1 (Type 53-51)(unguided to 9.2 km at 39 kt or 3.7 km at 51 kt; warhead 400 kg). Alternatively the submarine could carry 36 mines in its tubes.

But wait, don't all those American Carrier Groups usually have one or two of the 688I LA class subs attached to the group? It's pretty hard to sneak up on an I class with those trailing Sonar's. If there was one thing the Americans were good at besides sinking Destroyers stupid enough to fire on them, perhaps it was ASW. Every Carrier Group had a bunch of ASW aircraft. The Chinese were left with only 2 options: take their marbles and go home; or, the nuclear option. They probably would have taken their marbles and gone home were it not for the fact that the 18-month program they'd announced was in trouble, Bush had insulted them and if they backed down, the entire world would laugh at them.

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The flying times on an ICBM from China to the US is about 40 minutes, give or take. It didn't really matter to the Chinese; once they're fired they'll get there, eventually. It

made a whole lot of difference to the Americans, however. Satellites positioned over China gave the US the full flight time of the ICBMs to react to the attack. Lots of missiles were targeted on China, including Trident D's, Minuteman's and even some Peace-keepers. The US only has 500 Minuteman III's (1 warhead after Start II) and 50 Peace-keepers (10 warheads) deployed. There were 96 Trident C-4's deployed (1 warhead) plus 240 Trident D-5's (8 warheads) deployed by the US. The UK also had some of the Trident's deployed. Then there were the TLAM-N's, the AGM's and all of those nasty bombs. You've been to the movies, right? You know how those Chinese folks are about saving face; they're as bad as the Japanese, except they don't do the hara-kiri thing. Not with a knife, anyway. They did it with thermonuclear weapons.

Two 688I class subs were dispatched to locate and sink the Changzheng 6, the Xia class submarine, before it could launch its missiles against the US, or more importantly, the US Fleet. The Chinese sub never got out of the harbor. When the message came back, "Mission Accomplished", the US moved the DEFCON to DEFCON 2 for the second time in history. Satellites revealed that the Chinese might be planning to strike. The media leaked the change in the defense condition and everyone headed for cover. Jack headed home and started loading his truck and Moira showed up minutes later and started loading hers. Sandy was loading hers as fast as she could and when Jack and Moira finished they helped her. Selma got some clothes and put them and the kids in the car and headed for the mountains.

"The two of you take off and I'll wait for Steve to show up," Jack insisted.

"I'm not leaving if you don't," Moira said.

"Don't be silly honey," Jack urged. "I have everything I need here if we can't get to the cabin before something happens."

"Come on Moira," Sandy said, "We've got to hurry so we can get everything put away. Steve should be here in a few minutes and they won't be too far behind."

"Go ahead," Jack insisted, "I'll be fine."

Sandy and Moira took off and Jack stayed home waiting for Steve to show up and help him load the generators. While he was waiting, he put the rest of the food and Steve's radios in the 6'x12' trailer for Steve to pull. When Steve did show up, he had Marty with him and the two of them got on one end of a generator and Jack on the other.

"On the count of three," Jack said.

"How much does this dang thing weigh?" Marty grunted.

"About 600 pounds," Jack replied. "Don't drop it, we're almost there."

"How much does yours weigh, Jack?" Steve said.

“About 860 pounds,” Jack smiled. “But, I put it on wheels so it would be easier to move.”

“Now you tell me,” Steve complained. “Is everything else loaded?”

“I sent your radios with the girls and I loaded the left over things while I was waiting for you,” Jack explained. “How much time do you think we have?”

“I have no idea,” Steve said, “Let’s not stand around and talk about it.”

Jack’s generator hitched onto the pickup without any problem and they headed for the cabin as fast as they dared drive. They were about 5 miles from the cabin when the EAS announced that the US was under attack. They got to the cabin and lowered the food and radios into the shelter. They didn’t have time to deal with the generators, not right then. They sealed up the shelter and waited for the inevitable, the ground to begin shaking. They waited 20 minutes. Steve’s antenna tower was extended and they didn’t have time to lower it. No one uttered a word as they sat in the shelter waiting for the end of civilization.

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They felt a sharp jolt followed by a quaking motion. The experience was repeated several times over. When they were relatively certain that the attack was over, they climbed out of the shelter to get Steve’s generator into the shelter and Jack’s behind the shed and hooked up. From their vantage point they could see several of the mushroom clouds. However, the CDV-715 wasn’t clicking so they moved quickly to get the generator underground and Jack’s hooked up. Once they had Jack’s connected, they fired it up to make certain that the EMP hadn’t destroyed it. It fired right up so they got Randy to help them and they backed the truck up to unload Steve’s. It proved to be easier to just back the truck up under the winch, lift the generator a foot or so and pull the truck out from under. The CDV-715 began to click as the generator hit bottom. They climbed in the hatch and secured it behind them. Then they manhandled the RS 12000 into the utility room and hooked it up by the light of a flashlight. THE EMP had apparently taken out the solar panels or something associated with that setup.

“We got lucky,” Randy said. “I thought the EMP would take out both generators. But, I suppose there’s enough fuel to see us through if they’d both been taken out.”

“600 hours, Randy and we only need to stay down here 2 weeks so we have more than enough,” Steve explained.

“If that China diesel of yours is good for 600 hours, why did we bust our butt getting that Onan down here?” Randy asked.

“You ever heard the China diesel run?” Steve asked back.

“No.”

“Hope you don’t ever have to Randy, even with the soundproofing, it would keep you awake,” Steve grinned.

At approximately 3:42pm PDT, October 21, 2005, the United States of America entered the nuclear age in a whole new way. Steve and Marty didn’t rush out of the shelter to help anyone either. You couldn’t help someone if you died trying. Someone had finally forgotten what MAD stood for. The US killed more Chinese than the Chinese killed Americans, did that mean the US won? There were no winners on October 21, 2005, only losers. And the losers weren’t confined to the US and China; on that day, everyone lost whether they participated in the event directly or were 3,000 miles from the nearest damage.

In 1959, Lomitas Productions, Inc. produced a film starring Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Anthony Perkins, Fred Astaire, Donna Anderson, John Tate, Lola Brooks, John Meillon and Peter Williams based on a novel by Nevil Shute. Directed by Stanley Kramer, *On The Beach* was nominated for 2 Oscars and 2 Golden Globes. It won the UN Award and a Blue Ribbon Award for Kramer and a Golden Globe for Ernest Gold for Best Motion Picture Score. And, in the movie, everyone died. Not China, or the US, or the rest of the world for that matter, was so lucky in this case; people survived the nuclear nightmare.

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“Well, crap,” Randy said.

“I’d say that that about describes the situation,” Steve grimaced.

“I’m glad about one thing,” Randy went on.

“What’s that, Randy?” Jack asked.

“There is enough metal in this shelter to absorb any EMP that we could have gotten,” Randy replied. “I told that architect that this place had to survive anything but a direct hit. He usually designs facilities for the military and this place is nothing more than a concrete and steel faraday cage covered with 8’ of compacted earth.”

“What about all of our electronics in the cabin?” Steve asked.

“Aren’t in the cabin,” Randy replied, “I brought them all down here. Wiring just naturally attracts EMP so we may have lost the solar panels, or just the wiring.”

“At least the communications tower made it through ok,” Jack said. “Might have burned out the Alpha Delta lightning arrestors, though.”

“There are spares,” Steve remarked.

“Coffee or iced tea?” Sandy asked.

“Coffee,” Marty answered, “Marty Jr. was right, it is cold down here.”

By this time the CDV-717 was clicking so rapidly it was more like a buzz. Steve got up, looked at the dial and turned it off. “This thing is off the scale,” he announced.

“We don’t have time to thaw anything out for supper,” Moira announced, “What do you fellas want to eat?”

“Well, look at her,” Marty said, “Mrs. Cool and collected.”

“Marty what’s done is done,” Moira snapped. “What do you want me to do go sit in a corner and cry?”

“Sorry,” Marty mumbled.

“How about spaghetti and meat sauce?” Marty Jr. asked, breaking the tension. “Mom brought the stuff we were going to have for supper.”

Jack went over and connected all of his radios to the antenna switches. He turned on the Icom receiver, which was connected to a Diamond D130J, and got nothing but static on the radio. Everyone heard the static so he didn’t need to explain. He turned the radio back off and switched the antenna switch back to ground. Then he checked the remote weather sensors mounted on the radio tower and connected to instruments in the shelter. The wind was out of the west blowing about 8-10 mph. He figured the fallout would peak sometime during the evening and start to decay.

“Why don’t we start our countdown clock around midnight tonight?” he suggested.

“What countdown clock?” Steve asked.

“It’s an inexpensive clock that Moira picked up off the net,” Jack explained.

“I wonder what it’s like outside?” Selma wondered.

“Probably about like any other day, except there are fires burning in a multitude of places and there is a white grit in the air that leaves a path of death for the people who are unprotected,” Marty answered his wife. “You remember what they taught in Disaster Procedures, don’t you Jack?”

“The thing I remember more than anything else was that so many people would be unprepared when this finally happened,” Jack was somber now. “And to think that I thought you were nuts, Steve; I was just plain wrong.”

“I wanted to do this for a very long time, Jack,” Steve replied. “But if it weren’t for Randy and the favors everyone owed him, we wouldn’t be nearly as prepared as we are.”

“Supper’s ready,” Sandy finally announced.

Truthfully, most of them didn’t have much of an appetite, except for Marty Jr. Not even Armageddon would ruin the appetite of a teenaged boy. Then again, the boy hadn’t seen the death in the valley up close and personal, had he? Marty, Steve and Jack had seen enough of that in May to last them a lifetime. Maybe the good news was that it wasn’t much worse for those folks in northern California where they’d really had the BIG ONE. But, that was purely speculation. What would the effect be of maybe 1,000 nuclear weapons or more exploding on the United States? Would that finally trigger Yellowstone to blow? Would the New Madrid Fault have a 9.0 quake? Would all of the volcanoes in the Cascade Range finally blow their tops? Would President Bush be in charge of issuing clubs to fight WW IV? Would countries like France, Germany and Russia take advantage of the American and Chinese conditions and exploit the timing?

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Clocks tick at a uniform rate of 60 seconds per minute, 60 minutes per hour and 24 hours a day. If you’re old, the clocks tick very fast indeed and if you’re young, they crawl. If you’re middle aged, they just tick at a uniform rate of 60 seconds per minute, 60 minutes per hour and 24 hours a day. There are things that speed up or slow down a clock. Anticipation slows it down, having a task to accomplish and a deadline to meet speeds it up. 342:30... 300:00... 200:00... Being held captive by circumstances in a 30’x60’ building 8’ underground slows it down with the passage of time. Tick, tick, tick.

You got tired of watching DVD and VHS movies and the continuing static on the radios. You yearned for news of the outside world, but the Ham you heard didn’t have enough signal strength you could make out more than ¼ of what he said. The radio and TV channels were probably all toast, done in by the EMP, at least none of them were on the air. You heard some faint broadcast on your police radio, but the repeaters were probably down because you couldn’t make those out either. It was then that you realized that you hadn’t turned on your repeaters to aid others in their communications. So, you turned on the police band repeater and the 2-meter repeater but by that time, whoever was transmitting was through. 100:00... Tick, tick, tick.

“Any station, any station, this is KD6GDQ in Palmdale, come back,” the radio boomed.

“This is KX6ZZZ in the San Gabriel Mountains, we hear you KD6GDQ,” Jack replied. “What is your situation?”

“KX6ZZZ, not good,” the caller responded. “We have over 20 people in a shelter designed for 6, come back.”

“What’s it like in Palmdale, come back,” Jack responded.

“They hit Plant 42 and it’s hotter than a \$3 pistol, over,” the caller replied. “Uh, KD6GDQ clear, I have to break up another fight.”

Jack tried for over an hour to reestablish contact with the guy in Palmdale, but he wasn’t successful. He dug out his call sign book and looked up the guy’s call sign. Gary Olsen. Where had he heard that name before? Oh, yeah, that was the crackpot who’d written Bush the letter they’d published in the Times. Small world, wasn’t it? He never hooked up with Olsen again, maybe the fight turned into a blood bath.

“There are some survivors,” Jack announced. “You guys remember that nut in Palmdale who wrote Bush that letter that they published in the Times?”

“I wonder if Bush ever answered his letter.” Marty asked. “Probably wrote him and told him that he should Trust in God, and he’d take care of the rest.”

“Bush did a real fine job,” Steve muttered. “He’s probably safely tucked away in Mt. Weather with his family and Congress. They’ll probably get together and outlaw guns altogether.”

48:00... Tick, tick, tick.

On Saturday, November 5, 2005, they emerged from the shelter. The sky was clear and there was some snow on the ground. Even with binoculars they couldn’t see any cars moving in the valley down below. The background radiation level was low, 10mR/hr. So they were free to move about and check for residual radiation. There were relatively few small hot spots, but it wasn’t as bad as it could be. And even the hot spots weren’t really all that hot. Steve checked on the solar array and it was toast. But, he had replacement panels sealed in foil in Jack’s shed so they could get the power up again, hopefully. They’d burned about 665-gallons of the propane during the two-week period and about 2-gallons of diesel when they’d shut down the RS 12000 to service it.

“Where do we go from here?” Jack asked quietly.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Steve replied. “That was the whole idea of having a retreat in the first place. It was somewhere to be while the country pulled itself up by its bootlaces and I’m not planning on helping.”

“I’ll second that motion,” Marty said. “We have a lot to do here. We have to get Steve’s backup solar panels installed and chop more firewood. We’ll have to go down below and look for more food, too. We shouldn’t completely count on living on survival food.”

“The best place to do something like that would be a Costco or a Sam’s Club,” Jack suggested. “They have all of the larger packages and if we’re going to get some, we’d probably be better off doing it now than later.”

“We’ll take 4 trucks and Steve and Jack’s trailers,” Randy suggested. “I think I know where we can hook on to 2 more trailers, too.”

“Let’s get it done then,” Jack suggested. “Be sure to bring a Survey meter, we don’t want to take anything that’s hot.”

“It will all be hot, Jack,” Steve pointed out. “You mean we don’t want to take anything that’s radioactive.”

“Do you have enough solar panels to completely replace the roof?” Jack asked.

“Yes, but I think we’ll stop by the dealer’s warehouse and pick up lots of extras,” Steve replied.

Four pickup loads of food, plus 2 trailers worth, a trailer load of solar panels and a trailer load of ammo and sporting goods later, the men returned to the cabin. They hadn’t seen a lot of people and most of those they’d seen had been dead, nowhere to run to and nowhere to hide. Death from an overdose of radiation wasn’t a pleasant way to die; there had been ample evidence of that. They had hauled their deep freezers up to the cabin when they’d bugged out so they had plenty of meat for the time being. All of the meat and milk in the grocery stores was naturally spoiled and stunk to high heaven. Another trip or two to the valley the following day would give them enough food to last for an eternity. So, on Sunday, November 6th they made another trip to the valley and took all they could carry, twice.

Even with 4 pickups and 4 trailers, they barely made a dent in the amount of food that was available at the stores they stopped/shopped/looted at. On Monday, they would replace the solar panels and shut down the generator. Then, on Tuesday, they’d pull the propane trailer down to the valley and refill it and perhaps look for another propane trailer or 2 or 3. They’d also go back to their homes and pull the appliances and see about getting some lumber so they could erect additional cabins. The firewood would just have to wait. There was plenty of that counting back from when Steve and Jack had cut up the downfalls, the tree that the amateur logger had tried to fell and the tree they’d cut down earlier in the fall, mostly to keep it from falling on the cabin.

Monday, November 7th...

With Marty Jr. helping they removed all of the solar panels and replaced them, using about ½ of what they’d taken from the dealer’s warehouse. Steve suggested that when they went to the valley on the following day, they take Marty Jr. and all of the wives except Belinda. They could drive back 4 of those 3,000-gallon propane delivery trucks and plus refill the propane trailer. They should also pickup up those appliances from their homes and get Marty and Selma a set of orifices to convert their gas stove to propane. They’d also need 3 electric hot water heaters and electric dryers to use their only source of power, electricity. With the electricity restored towards evening, they called it a day.

Tuesday, November 8th...

"I might as well just get a new stove," Marty announced. "Our old stove was junk anyway and we can just find me a new propane stove and not have to look for orifices."

After locating and filling 4 propane delivery trucks and filling the propane trailer, they sent Marty Jr. and the 3 wives back to the cabin and just got new everything for all of them. That included 4 new washers, 4 new propane dryers, 4 refrigerators and 4 new propane kitchen stoves. They added to that 4 high-efficiency 'Franklin Stoves' to provide wood-generated heat for the new cabins they were intent on building. Why 4 of everything, you might ask? They were counting on company. Sergeant was a survivalist, too and the odds were that he and his family were hunkered down in his basement shelter and would be turning up at the cabin any day. When they hit the solar dealer's warehouse they took three times as much as they had earlier, giving them enough solar power for all of the new cabins they intended to build and plenty of spares. The dealer had a lot of batteries too and they stocked up on those and inverters.

"Steve, you're under arrest," Marty said. "The charge is looting."

"Marty, you're under arrest, too," Steve echoed. "Same charge, should I shoot on sight?"

Big John – Chapter 13 – Cops & Robbers

Technically, that isn't correct. Burglary is defined as, "The felony of breaking into and entering the house of another at night with the intent to commit a felony therein, extended by statute to cover the breaking and entering of any various buildings, by night or day." Robbery is defined as, "The felonious taking of the property of another from his person or in his immediate presence, against his will, by violence or intimidation." Looting, it seems, had several definitions, including but not limited to: "pillaging, anything taken by dishonesty, valuable objects, money, to take something away, as in plunder and pillage, to rob or burgle, etc." Jack, Steve, Marty and Randy weren't robbers, maybe burglars and definitely looters. Then again, so was most everyone else who was still living.

There weren't any clerks in any of the stores to take their money and they had money and could pay, if necessary. So, they were supposed to go without and hope that someday someone would come along and open the store? Would that someone be the owner of the store or some opportunist who was just trying to make a buck by selling someone else's property? If you wanted to rationalize, you could claim that they were just collecting and protecting the goods until the rightful owner appeared. You could, but they weren't, they were surviving the way most of the other people were. And what good did most of the laws on the books do anyway in a post nuclear-holocaust situation? There was going to need to have to be a new set of laws written more applicable to the situation at hand.

No doubt there were a lot of people who said, "I'd never loot." No doubt. But if it came right down to whether or not a man's family starved, would he take food to feed them? If he ran out of propane for the stove that they used to cook that food and no one was around to sell him propane, would he eat uncooked beans or rice? That would be an experience that much is sure. I suppose the average guy would rip the siding off his house and burn that to get heat for the house and to cook those beans and rice. Stucco doesn't burn very easily. Well, maybe he could take the chimney off his oil lamp and light it after dark and heat those beans and rice. *Les Misérables* is the story of a Jean Valjean, who stole a loaf of bread and was chucked in prison for 19 years. Cops these days are told to shoot looters on sight, but they never do. And, it's a little different stealing food to feed your family than it is to steal a TV just because it's there. Stealing is stealing and the Bible says thou shall not steal. So shoot the SOB over that loaf of bread and his family can go on welfare, right?

That theory that Carl Sagan and others had about *Nuclear Winter* had been thoroughly attacked and pretty much discredited after Sagan's death. That remained to be seen, didn't it? If you studied Sagan's theory, you would discover that it presumed massive fires and billions of tons of smoke being thrown into the atmosphere. There had been smoke, for sure, but probably not even millions of tons. The *Nuclear Winter* scenario made a lot more sense if applied to something like a super volcano, as would happen if Yellowstone blew its top. In that case, one would be talking about 10's or 100's of millions or billions of tons of dirt and ash being thrown into the atmosphere. There was

plenty of evidence to suggest that volcanic eruptions had caused just such circumstances 100 times or more in the past. What happened to the dinosaurs?

“Jack if we clear enough trees,” Steve said, “We’d have room for more than just 4 new cabins.”

“Then I suppose that we’d better make another run at the appliance distributors and then start hitting the lumberyards,” Jack replied.

“Belinda and I talked it over and she is going to remain in the shelter for the present time,” Randy announced. “We both would feel better if her exposure to radiation, no matter how small, were limited.”

“It makes sense to me Randy,” Jack responded.

That was another thing that they would have to deal with, the absence of professional medical attention. Still, they were probably better off than most of the population, they were healthy and nobody took any prescription drugs that they had to worry about. Plus one in their group was a trained Paramedic, which probably put them about 10 steps up on most of the population. So far, despite the one snowstorm, the roads were clear. If they were going to pillage, salvage was what they preferred to call it, there was no time like the present. There sure weren’t any city or country or state employees to clear the roads. However, they could recover a snowplow on a truck that was loaded with that sanding mixture, couldn’t they?

Wednesday, November 9th...

About 8am, just as they were about to leave to loot and pillage again, the Sergeant showed up with his wife Elizabeth and their two kids, Sandra and William.

“Where are you guys headed?” the Sergeant asked.

“To loot and pillage and burgle and salvage,” Jack laughed.

“Well hang on a minute and let me get the family settled and Billy and I will join you,” the Sergeant chuckled.

Moira had decided that she was going along so that meant that they could pair up. Jack and Moira, Steve and Randy, Marty Sr. and Jr. plus the Sergeant and Billy. And considering that they had 4 pickups and 4 trailers, it would work out fine. Sandy said that she’d get Selma to drive her up to where the state had the sanding refill site and see about finding a truck. And, just for chits and giggles, Jack and Moira decided to wear their western rigs with their pistols available as backups. Jack didn’t look anything like James Arness, but he was about the same size (1” shorter at 6’6) 10 pounds heavier (245 vs. 235) and had the same measurements, 48-36-36.

Jack and Moira headed to the appliance distributor's warehouse to fill their pickup and trailer. They got more washers, dryers, water heaters and stoves. Then, they went to Moira's store and added all of the small appliances they could perceive needing. When they didn't have room to haul any more, they headed to a propane distributor and picked up another 3,000-gallon delivery truck filled with propane.

Steve and Randy hit two drug stores and cleaned out what Steve figured they'd want to have on hand for prescription medicines. Then, they hit a hospital and loaded up on bandages, IV supplies, syringes and more drugs. After that, they went to the lumberyard where they joined the two Marty's and the Sergeant and Billy. They were loading pre-cut studs on this trip. When the pickups and trailers were filled they went to the propane distributor, got the 4 remaining delivery trucks and filled them with propane before heading to the cabin.

"We can't run our appliance off those propane delivery trucks," Steve said.

"No, we can't, but we have all of those 100# bottles we can refill," Jack replied.

"I never thought about that," Steve murmured.

"We have enough appliances and stuff to build maybe 11 cabins," Jack continued, "How did we make out on lumber?"

"Fair, but we can get enough studs tomorrow and the insulation," Marty replied. "I saw a lot of bags of that premixed concrete so that will solve our problem with concrete. All we'll need is a couple of concrete mixers."

"There's that rental place in Pomona that has those," Steve pointed out. "We should probably get all we can haul."

"We're going to need saws, hammers and so forth," Jack said.

"We'll hit a Home Depot tomorrow and get wiring, electrical fixtures and tools," the Sergeant suggested. "We're going to need plumbing fixtures and stuff like that too."

"And furniture," Sandy snuck in.

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"Mr. Canfil, you seem to have fallen in among thieves!" the Duke said.

"It does seem so, Admiral, I'm very happy to say!" Stanley Holloway replied.

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Thursday, November 10th...

“Sergeant Rowland, could you answer a question for me?”

“I’ll try Jack. What do you want to know?”

“Your first name.”

“You already know my first name, Jack, you just used it.”

“What?”

“Jack, my first name is Sergeant.”

Sergeant and Billy headed to the Home Depot to load up on what he’d talked about the previous evening. The others headed back to the lumberyard. Once there, they loaded up all of the premixed concrete, all of the precut studs, insulation and some 2x6s and 2x8s. They returned to the cabin, unloaded, ate lunch and all of them returned to the lumberyard to finish up getting the materials they needed like 2x10s and 2x12s and nails for the nail guns and loose nails. They decided to rough side the outside of the cabins with plywood and got a pickup and a trailer full. They still needed more plywood, windows, doors and siding of some sort for the homes. But, they were getting closer and from the looks of the sky, they only had about one more day before a big storm blew in.

“We’ll finish cleaning out the lumberyard of what we need tomorrow, fellas,” Jack suggested. “After that, we’ll run by the rental place and pick up what construction equipment we need.”

“Do you think the storm will hold off long enough for us to get everything?” Steve asked.

“I have no idea, Steve,” Jack replied. “Ask Fritz Coleman (KNBC) if you can find him. Are we getting much radio traffic?”

“A little, but not much,” Sandy replied. “I don’t know if that means everyone is dead or just that a lot of the Ham’s lost their radio equipment due to EMP.”

“What about the guy up in Palmdale?” Jack asked.

“Not a peep,” Sandy replied. “I heard a guy in Littlerock (the one in California) talking to another guy in Littlerock about 3 old guys running around with automatic weapons salvaging like we are.”

Coincidence? Not hardly. But those old guys didn’t get to the Inland Empire very much, or so I’ve read.

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Article from Geo-Strategy Direct dated 1/11/05:

Subject: Russia-China exercise 'aimed at the United States'

Moscow announced last week that Russian and Chinese military forces would participate in joint exercises. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said the first-ever exercises could involve strategic nuclear forces - a sign that both Moscow and Beijing are preparing to collaborate in a nuclear war against the United States.

The exercises will be held in China during the second half of the year.

"The Russian side will not bring big numbers of servicemen, but mostly state-of-the art weapons - navy, air, long-range aviation, submarines to practice interaction with China in different forms of military maneuvers," Ivanov said.

Pavel Felgenhauer, a Russian military analyst, said the exercise is a signal of Moscow's irritation toward the United States.

"It's a symbolic gesture aimed at the United States, intended to show that Russia has other allies," Felgenhauer said.

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Maybe that was where the Chinese got the idea that they could take on the United States. By participating with the Chinese in the joint exercise and building up their hopes, perhaps the Russians hoped to lure the US and China into a nuclear confrontation and eliminate two enemies. Do you suppose, huh?

Friday, November 11th... Traditional Veteran's Day...

There weren't any parades to attend this year or any traffic to direct. It was more hard work, finishing up the lumberyard and getting the concrete mixers and some of that plastic siding for the cabins. They had just finished loading the 4 mixers when it began to snow. It really came down, too, most unusual for the valley. That probably meant that it had started earlier in the mountains and they hoped against hope that they could get home. Never fear, Sandy's here!

When Sandy saw the snow beginning about an hour after they'd left for the second and final trip, she dressed warmly, fueled the snowplow and ventured down the mountain to where the snowfall stopped. She parked the truck there and left it idling to keep the cab warm. About 2 hours later the pickups appeared and she plowed a way through the snow that was building rapidly. She could only cut a single furrow, but that was enough. Thankfully the fellas had put the chains on the snowplow that morning before they left the first time. And, all of the pickups had 4 wheel drive so they had enough traction to creep up the fire road to the cabin. It was snowing too hard at the cabin to bother un-

loading so they covered what they had with tarps they picked up somewhere and went inside to get warm.

Belinda was finally staying in the cabin. She didn't relish going back to the shelter and the dosimeters the others were still wearing didn't indicate any radiation so she'd decided to come up from her cave. Sandy had started home baked bread that morning and it had risen the first time and been punched down. Beth and Selma had put it the pans, it had re-risen and it was just about ready to come out of the oven. They had lots of beans in their provisions so Sandy had taken out some ground meat for chili. It was bubbling on the stove adding to the aroma from the baking bread.

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Chili - Favorite food of Lt. Columbo (Peter Falk), the sloppy but clever homicide detective on the police drama COLUMBO/NBC/1971-77. He liked to eat his chili (with beans or without) with ketchup and crackers. Columbo washed down his chili dinner with a sparkling creme soda. Chili was also the food of choice of San Francisco police consultant Robert T. Ironside (Raymond Burr) on the police drama IRONSIDE/NBC/1967-75. On the sitcom HAZEL/NBC/CBS/1961-66 Hazel the maid (Shirley Booth) and the wife of her new employer Barbara Baxter (Lynn Borden) ventured into the food making business with a homemade chili recipe called "Aunt Hazel's Chili Sauce." On the sitcom ALICE/CBS/1976-85 people came from miles around to eat at Mel's Diner and to sample the taste of Mel's Famous Chili.

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Saturday, November 12th...

The cabin was crowded because it only had 3 bedrooms, Steve and Sandy's, Randy and Belinda's and Jack and Moira's. In earlier days when the four couples had been at the cabin, Marty and Selma took Jack's travel trailer and the kids slept in the main room. It was too cold for the travel trailer but they used it anyway and cranked the heat up. That only left Sergeant, Elizabeth, Sandra (not Sandy) and Billy (not William) to provide for. So, they moved Sergeant and his family to the shelter along with Sissy (real name Mary Elizabeth) and Billy. The snow had let up long enough for them to dig a path and after that, they kept the path cleared.

But, that was only the sleeping arrangement and during the days, the fourteen people spent their time in the cabin. It continued to snow off and on all day Saturday. The ladies decided to make some 'cold weather' food and re-hydrated some vegetables and made a stew using a cut up beef roast. They had eaten about half of the bread the evening before so Sandy decided to make another batch and form some of the loaves into 'french bread'. (French didn't deserve to be capitalized.)

"I think that once the snow settles down, we ought to think about cutting down all of those dead pine trees," Steve suggested. "We can't get to the valley for a couple of days and we're going to need a lot of firewood once we get the cabins built."

"How many dead trees do you have?" Marty asked.

"A lot," Steve said. "Probably half. The Angeles National Forest doesn't have as big a problem as the San Bernardino National Forest."

"I thought it all was the Angeles National Forest," Jack said.

"No, Jack, that stops at the Los Angeles County Line," Steve replied. "It's the same forest, it just changes names. We're in San Bernardino County. Anyway, the bark beetle infestation is worse in the eastern forest. We have to get those trees down before the wood goes bad."

"What kinds of trees are there in the area that are dead or dying?" Marty asked.

"Trees killed by fire were evenly distributed among Canyon live oak, Jeffrey pine and Black oak. Some of the fire-killed oaks may re-sprout from their roots, while the pines will not," Steve explained. "Though no species is immune, almost half of the trees currently being killed by the drought are white fir and Jeffrey pine. The remainders of the dead trees are almost equally big cone Douglas fir, Piñon pine, Coulter pine, Sugar pine, Black oak and Canyon live oak. Canyon live oak is a medium-sized evergreen of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico with oblong leathery, often spiny-edged leaves. Black oak is a medium to large deciduous timber tree generally of the eastern United States and southeastern Canada having dark outer bark and yellow inner bark used for tanning. Its leaves are 5-lobed leaves with bristle tips. The wood is lumped with other oak species and sold as red oak for general construction lumber and furniture."

"That black oak is a hard wood?" Jack asked.

"Right Jack," Steve replied. "If we harvest any of it, we'll divide it evenly among the families so they have a log to leave in the stove when they go to bed at night. It should burn a little longer."

"Whoa, rock and roll," Marty said in response to the shaking. "Are we being bombed again?"

"Probably only an earthquake," Jack replied. "You didn't think that they would go away with civilization, did you?"

"Sandy said she heard two guys talking from Littlerock the other day," Steve said. "Do you suppose we ought to go up there and check it out?"

“Maybe after we get the cabins built this coming spring we can,” Sergeant suggested.

“Do you know what we forgot to get?” Marty asked.

“What?” Steve asked.

“We didn’t get any paneling or drywall for the inside of the houses,” Marty said.

“I guess as soon as it get nice outside, we’ll do that before we go get firewood,” Jack suggested.

“Jack it should only take a couple of trucks to get some paneling and paneling would be easier to install than dry wall,” Steve responded. “We can use ceiling tiles on the lids and paneling on the walls and get a rustic look. Just be sure to get the finishing nails with the colored heads. Why don’t you see if you can find another chainsaw or two when you go to the valley? We could use some more chainsaw oil, too.”

“I’ll get all of that and some molding and baseboard while I’m at it, so we can give it a finished look,” Jack smiled.

“We can move our own furniture,” Sergeant suggested. “I don’t want to take something we already have.”

“You know, that’s probably what we should all do,” Steve said. “If what we have is no good, we can replace it like Marty did. Otherwise it only makes sense to get our stuff first. That will automatically give us furnishings for extra cabins. Hell, let the firewood wait, let’s get down the hill and get our stuff.”

“We’re just Robin and his Merry Men,” Jack laughed. “*Robin Hood, Robin Hood, Riding through the glen, Robin Hood, Robin Hood, With his band of men, Feared by the bad, loved by the good, Robin Hood! Robin Hood! Robin Hood!*”

“Don’t give up your day job, Jack,” Steve advised.

“I almost remember that old TV show, who was in it?” Sergeant asked.

“Richard Greene was almost the only person who was in the entire series,” Jack replied. “The actor who played Friar Tuck died right after the series ended, there were 2 Maid Marian’s and Little John was the same person, but missed some episodes. Those were the ‘good old days’ of black and white television.”

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Sunday, November 13th...

It had stopped snowing and the skies were clear. It was also especially cold on this Sunday. They talked it over and decided to wait until the next day to get their furniture and the things they needed to finish the cabins they'd be building. There was no TV to watch, just their collection of movies. The kids had their CD players and CD collections so if they didn't like the movie, they could go to another room and listen to music or play a board game.

How many people remember when you went to the matinee on Saturday afternoon, to church on Sunday morning and to Grandpa and Grandma's house on Sunday afternoon? Those were the so-called good old days before there were 13 channels of TV if you were lucky, followed a few years later by 50-75 on cable and then 500 if you had a satellite TV dish. The cabin had the satellite TV dish, but that was as far as it went. You couldn't receive signals that weren't being sent. But, they weren't down to clubs, yet. If they were careful with that ammunition, it should last them for a while. Maybe by that time old Dubya would come out of his hole and issue those clubs.

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Monday, November 14th...

The roads were clear enough to venture down the mountain so they bundled up warmly and went as a caravan this time. They went first to Sergeant's and then to Marty's. Moira was keeping a list of what they decided to leave behind and when they had the other possessions, they took them to the cabin. They used the dozer to clear an area, laid down some plywood and stacked the furniture. They return to Steve and Jack's to get their things and called it a day. Most of Sergeant's stuff was in good shape. Some was a little worn, but not beyond having several good years of life. About half of Marty's stuff wasn't worth taking, but it was easy to imagine why that was the case. Most of Steve and Sandy's stuff was worth moving and all of Jack and Moira's was, it being mostly new. It made them feel a little more whole to have their things with them, even if they were piled outside securely covered by several tarps.

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Tuesday, November 15th...

This was the day that they were going back down the mountain and see about interior wall coverings and ceiling tile. Plus Steve wanted one or two more chainsaws and some chainsaw oil. Jack had tossed in a 5-gallon can of gas and one of the stops they made was to pick up a portable gasoline fueled 4kw generator. Jack was thinking that it didn't make much sense to keep burning their diesel fuel when there was plenty of diesel fuel in the tanks at the hundreds of gas stations in the area. Since it had only been less than a month since Armageddon, he also figured that the fuel in the tanks was probably still good and didn't need to be stabilized. Nevertheless, they picked up what stabilizer they could find in a couple of stores. They used that fuel pump that Jack had taken from Randy's construction shop and refilled their tanks. They also kept an eye out for empty

55-gallon drums, noting their locations for future recovery. They got all of the building materials they figured they'd need to build 15, not 11, cabins and went back up the hill and unloaded one more time.

After a quick lunch and some hot coffee to remove the chill they headed back down below to get those 55-gallon drums and fill them. Over the lunch hour they had emptied all of those 5-gallon cans of diesel into the large diesel tank and taken them too to be re-filled. They had one truck and trailer filled with the 5-gallon cans and they went to where the spotted drums were and took all of those they could carry. Over lunch Steve had remarked that they should have gotten more of those portable generators so they had portable power when they started to build the cabins. They picked up 3 more identical units and then went to the Chevron station and began to recover the gas and diesel. They were now taking about $\frac{1}{3}$ gas and $\frac{2}{3}$ diesel because of the generators and the two new chainsaws. They had plenty of PRI-D, but needed more of the PRI-G and that was easy enough to come by. This trip was the first time they saw any people. They weren't in uniform but they had their badges in their hip pockets in the badge cases. They folded open the cases and stuck them in their left front shirt pockets, but whoever it was they saw was either being careful or was just plain shy.

They had spotted far more barrels than they could load up and haul on this particular day so when they had the barrels filled, Steve brought his pump too, they headed back to the cabin. 55-gallons of gasoline goes maybe 400 pounds give or take so they used that lowering winch for the shelter to off load the barrels of diesel fuel and gasoline and rolled the barrels a fair distance from the cabin before up-righting them.

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Wednesday, November 16th...

They could easily get ten barrels in each of the pickups plus another dozen or maybe more on the trailers. It sort of averaged out to 24 barrels per vehicle because some of the trucks had short beds but bigger trailers. That basically meant that they could salvage 5,280-gallons of diesel and gas combined. On this particular day, they went 50-50 gas and diesel, for both trips. They could probably find even more empty 55-gallon drums if they looked, but they were going to end up with a lot of fuel anyway. And, it was taking a fair amount of time to pump that fuel using only the electrically powered pumps that were only rated at a few gallons a minute.

Around 3:00, give or take, Moira spotted some movement about in the same place they had seen movement on the previous day. She got Jack's attention and he got Steve, Marty and Sergeant's attention and they fanned out to flank and surrounded whoever was lurking in the shadows. Billy and Marty kept the fuel pumps running, continuing to fill the barrels. The men and Moira moved until they had the spot where Moira had seen the movement completely encircled. Keep in mind that these people were mostly people with long backgrounds in law enforcement. They were using a crude system of hand

signals and everyone had one hand on a gun. Moira spotted her first. She waived for the men to hold their positions.

“My name is Moira, honey,” Moira spoke to someone hiding amidst a pile of boxes, “What’s yours?”

“Jennifer,” a tiny voice replied.

“Jennifer, the men with me are all policeman and we’re here to help you,” Moira continued.

“No you’re not, your just stealing gas,” the little girl replied.

“That’s right Jennifer, we are collecting gas,” Moira continued. “Are you cold? You look cold.”

“A little,” Jennifer replied.

“Are you hungry? I have a sandwich in the pickup,” Moira prompted.

“A whole sandwich I could have all for myself?” Jennifer asked.

“Yes and a can of soda if you like one,” Moira answered.

“Ok, I’m coming out, but don’t shoot,” Jennifer replied.

Jack took that as a clue and broke into the Chevron station and began loading all flavors of soda into the back of the pickup. He found an Orange flavored soda and handed it to Moira who was now sitting in the front seat of the pickup with Jennifer in back doing a fine imitation of someone who hadn’t eaten in days. Now that they had the station open, the men went inside to check for anything they could use like belts, oil, and filters. Moira continued to slowly draw Jennifer out. It appeared that Jennifer’s parent(s) had been killed. She also told Moira that she had been out looking for food for herself and Joey. Joey was her 4-year old brother and she told Moira that Joey was ‘at home’. Jack had also taken some of those fast food things like Twinkies with a shelf life that exceeded that of the motor oil they’d taken. It wasn’t necessarily very nutritional, but according to the date on the package, it hadn’t expired yet.

With gentle coaxing, Moira managed to get Jennifer to agree to show her where ‘home’ was. Jack also grabbed all of the candy bars because as cool as it was, they were probably ok to eat. Their truck was loaded so Jack and Moira went off in search of ‘home’. It seems that Joey was Jennifer’s younger brother and they hadn’t seen their parents “since forever’. That was the day, Jennifer told Moira, that the ground shook like when they had that quake thing only this time there were funny clouds in the sky. Mommy and Daddy hadn’t come home from work that day and the lady they’d stayed with kept them in her basement and kept going outside to check on Mommy and Daddy.

Later, Jennifer said, Mrs. Campbell had gotten sick and went to sleep. She was at her house next door. Moira and Jennifer went into 'home' and found Joey. Moira brought them both to the truck and went back inside to get clothing for the kids. Then, she went back inside and put all of their toys in plastic trash bags and put them in the back of the truck. Jennifer insisted on looking in the bag of toys and she took out a Strawberry Patch doll and Joey's favorite toy. Moira stayed in the pickup while Jack went to check on Mrs. Campbell. Mrs. Campbell was dead, from an obvious case of radiation poisoning. Mrs. Campbell had kept the children in the basement for the entire 2 weeks but had kept going upstairs to check on their parents. That told the whole story, really, so Jack and Moira returned to the Chevron station to pick up the others.

Big John – Chapter 14 – Freeze Dried Family

Later the same day at the cabin...

“Jack, can we keep them?” Moira asked.

“Honey, they have a mother and a father and just because they haven’t been able to get to their children doesn’t mean they’re dead,” Jack replied. “There could be a dozen different explanations why they haven’t come home and only one of those is because they’re dead. However, someone needs to take care of those children so it might as well be us. I’ll drive to the valley and leave a note on their door and on the neighbor’s door tomorrow morning.”

Poppycock. If their parents were still alive and able they’d have crawled on hands and knees to get to their children. If they weren’t able, what might that suggest? Nothing good. Nevertheless, Jack took the position he did to protect Moira, just in case. Joey was a cute little guy and Jennifer was trying so hard to act grown up. Before he left the notes, Jack was planning on looking around the house a little. He could probably find a piece of mail or a paid bill and get the last name. Maybe he could even find the kids’ birth certificates if he searched very carefully. He’d get Steve to go along with him and help.

Thursday, November 17th...

After searching the house and learning the name, Jack left the notes:

“Mr. and Mrs. Cummings,

Jennifer and Joey are safe with my wife and me. Give the San Bernardino Sheriff my name and he can reach us.

Jack Douglas
Reserve Officer
SBSD”

“It’s not too cryptic is it?” Jack asked Steve.

“It’s reassuring, Jack, if they’re still alive,” Steve replied. “Which frankly I doubt.”

“I wasn’t sure what to do, so I told Moira they could stay with us until their parents showed up,” Jack explained.

“At least we got the kids’ birth certificates so we know when their birthdays are,” Steve seemed pleased. “Why don’t we load up their beds and dressers? We’ll make room in the main room by moving some furniture.”

“Fine by me,” Jack replied.

They started loading the furniture into the back of Jack’s pickup when a little terrier came running in through an open door and bolted straight for the kitchen where a bowl of food was set out. Another touch of home? When the small dog had eaten its fill, it went down the hall to the bathroom and got a drink from the stool. It seemed obvious that the dog belonged to the house, but the men were amazed that such a little dog could get a drink from the toilet. They looked around and found a 50# bag of dog food and a pet transporter. The dog and food came with them. When they arrived at the cabin, they took the dog and food into the house.

“Toto,” Jennifer yelled. “Where have you been? Bad dog.”

Toto was washing Jennifer’s face, licking a mile a minute. Then, the dog jumped on Joey and greeted him. Jack and Steve moved a couple pieces of furniture, brought in the beds and set them up. They also brought in the dressers and Moira returned the children’s clothes to the dressers.

“Did you find my Mommy and Daddy, too?” Jennifer asked.

“No, but we left them a note and told them you were staying with us until they came home,” Jack told Jennifer.

“Oh, ok,” Jennifer, said running off to play with Toto.

The average motor vehicle uses less than 1,000 gallons of fuel a year (~700g). Sandy and Moira’s vehicles were diesel pickups, as were Jack and Steve’s. Randy had the Jeep SUV and Marty and Sergeant drove cars. They were going to have to do something about Marty and Sergeant because their personal vehicles weren’t especially adaptable to the mountain conditions. When the others came in from cutting timber, the men sat down and talked it over. They decided that they might just as well add Grand Theft-Auto to their list of crimes. So rather than going back to the woods after lunch, Marty and Sergeant cleaned out their vehicles and drove them down the mountain to a nearby dealership. They went with good used crew-cab long-bed diesel-powered pickups with 4-wheel drive and left their cars as ‘trade-ins’. Next, they went to a store that carried truck toolboxes and added one to each truck. Finally, they went to the place that had the trailers and each hooked on to a 7’x14’ open trailer.

All of their vehicles were now diesels. They talked briefly about driving up and down I-10 to locate a delivery tanker with a load of diesel fuel, but passed on that for the moment because they simply didn’t have room at the cabin to store so large a truck and it would be tough get that truck up the fire road. Still, they didn’t completely dismiss the idea. That would beat the hell out of pumping the fuel from the service stations storage tanks. At the moment, however, they weren’t making it a habit to get out and about. Who knew what might be waiting for them in that valley down below? Trouble, probably.

While they were down in the valley shopping for new pickups, Randy had fired up the dozer and scraped off the place they intended to build the cabins. The ground wasn't frozen that hard and he'd managed to complete the task before they got home. Randy wasn't paying any attention to property lines and he graded an area large enough for about 15 homes. He suggested, rather emphatically, that they could get slabs in and the cabins framed in before it got really cold. Any thoughts they had of gathering firewood rapidly dissipated and they thought about how crowded it was in the cabin.

◦

Friday, November 18th...

"We'll build them square," Randy said. "That's the most efficient building and gets you the biggest cabin for the smallest amount of lumber. Helps with the heat distribution, too."

"How big should we make them?" Marty asked.

"44' square will give you just under 2,000 square feet," Randy replied.

They used 2x6 lumber to form in the slabs and by the end of the day had a fifteen slabs formed in. They were now experiencing a brief period of warmth following the snow-storm. They didn't have any rebar, but they did have several rolls of mesh. Each slab would take about 35 yards of concrete since they were making them so thick.

"Wait a minute here," Jack said surveying the scene. "How many bags of Sackrete does it take to make a yard of concrete?"

"They're 80 pound bags Jack, they yield 2 square feet of concrete 4" thick per bag," Randy replied.

"That's 968 bags of Sackrete per slab and only if the slabs are 4" thick," Jack said.

"Sounds about right," Randy replied. "We're talking about 3 12-yard loads of concrete per slab."

"We don't have that much Sackrete," Marty observed.

"We can use pre-cast pillars instead of foundations," Randy suggested. "It will mean a few trips down the mountain but I know where we can get all of those we'd ever need."

It didn't take them nearly as long to knock apart those forms as it had taken to put them in place.

◦

Saturday, November 19th...

The pillar-manufacturing place had a semi-tractor and lowboy trailer. They loaded the trailer full of pillars and more on the 6 pickups and 6 trailers. They also brought the forklift with them. They used the forklift to unload the pickups and trailer and then went back to the road and unloaded the low boy. Then they took the second load of pillars up the fire road and unloaded them. They turned it all around and made a second trip down the mountain and repeated the entire process a second time. All of them were tired after dealing with the pillars, which were awkward to deal with and heavy.

◦

Sunday, November 20th...

They took the morning off and after lunch figured out that they'd put the pillars 11 across and 11 deep for each of the cabins. They got dressed and went outside and used the forklift to begin placing the pillars. They had brought a total of 792 pillars, enough for 6 homes and half of a seventh. They worked well past dark setting those pillars and even had to set up some working lights to finish.

◦

Monday, November 21st...

They picked up another 792 pillars on Monday, leaving them 231 pillars short of what they needed. They talked it over in the evening and decided that they would send the semi down for what they needed the following day with 2 drivers and 2 outriders. The rest of them would stay at the cabin and continue to put the pillars in place. The two Marty's and Sergeant and Billy would go down the hill. Jack, Steve and Randy would keep the forklift and move as many of the pillars as possible. There was a second, larger forklift at the business in the valley so it shouldn't take them all that long. They could get 198 pillars on the semi and 33 on a truck and trailer. It was going to work out perfectly.

"Moira?" Jennifer asked.

"Yes, honey, what do you want?" Moira asked.

"Do you know when my Mommy and Daddy are coming back?" Jennifer inquired.

"I really don't, Jennifer," Moira admitted. "Maybe they got hurt. Otherwise they'd have been there for you and Joey sooner."

"They're dead, huh?" Jennifer responded.

"We don't know that for sure," Moira said.

“That’s ok,” Jennifer said, “They’re with Grandma now. She was probably lonely anyway. Can Joey and I stay with you and Jack?”

A few subtle questions revealed that Jennifer’s maternal grandmother had died of ‘the cancer’ in July 2005, the firecracker month. Moira told Jack about the conversation and he said that Steve thought the parents were probably dead. He, Jack, didn’t have any objection to the kids staying on. ‘Just be forewarned’, he told Moira, that there was always a possibility that the parents could show up. But, Jack admitted, it seemed unlikely and someone had to raise those two kids, and it might just as well be them as anyone.

o

Tuesday, November 22nd...

While the 4 men went to the valley to get the last 231 pillars, Randy, Jack and Steve worked to get the pillars set in place. They were hard at it when the others arrived back from the valley and rather than stopping to unload, the pickups and trailers were taken down the fire road and the pillars transferred. When all six pickups and all six trailers were sitting full of pillars, they still had one pickup load and trailer load of pillars to bring up the fire road. Steve started to unload one of the trailers and pickups so they could get the last load. They hadn’t bothered to bring the bigger forklift up the fire road. He continued unloading the trailers and pickups and using those pillars to continue the cabins.

Later, the 4 men had disconnected a trailer and had gone back down the fire road to return the semi, lowboy and forklift to the manufacturer. They didn’t want a semi sitting at the base of the fire road like a beacon marking the road to the cabin. However, when they got back and looked at the fire road, they realized that the hard pack roadbed clearly showed extensive signs of use. This was another rock and a hard place with them in the middle, but they couldn’t see any immediate solution. Working late into the night for a second night they finished the day with all 15 cabins ready for the next stage of construction.

“I just hope no one saw our lights,” Jack said when they’d finished.

“Why not Jack?” Steve asked. “We only need four of the fifteen cabins we’re building. We need to advertise to get some more people up here.”

“The problem with advertising,” Jack pointed out, “is you don’t always reach the intended audience.”

“I’ll do some dozer work tomorrow and dig a big hole,” Randy said.

“What for Randy?” Jack asked.

“Why to bury the bodies, of course,” Randy laughed.

“Somebody is going to have to go down the mountain tomorrow,” Marty pointed out.

“What did we forget this time, Marty?” Steve wanted to know.

“Septic tanks and stuff for a drain field,” Marty replied.

“He’s right,” Sergeant chimed in. “The 4 of us will go down below and get that stuff tomorrow. Randy, you can dig a hole all right, but make it for an expansion to the septic field.”

“We’re going to need a backhoe and a trencher,” Randy said. “Don’t worry fellas, I know just where we can borrow some and return them when we’re done.”

As far as the freeze-dried family goes, you take two small youngsters with missing parents; add a little water, food and love and you have an instant family, complete with yapping dog. Mix in a 40-year-old woman who can’t have kids and a gentle giant with a soft spot and it sort of comes together, albeit slowly. The smart woman knows to bundle that little boy up in his winter wear and send him outside to ‘work with Jack’. She also knows to send the two teenaged girls out to watch the little boy so he doesn’t get run over by the forklift. Things do have a way of coming together.

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Wednesday, November 23rd...

They all went down the mountain on Wednesday because they were getting a little tired of forgetting things. They picked up 3 ‘motel sized’ septic tanks, plenty of drain field piping, a couple of loads of pea rock, some schedule 40 PVC drain piping, galvanized and copper piping for the water, cement, solder, blowtorches and cylinders, missing plumbing fixtures, additional electrical parts and fixtures and everything else that they might need to finish the cabins.

The pillars were all 4’ on center except for the outer row, which were outset 3’. That’s what Randy wanted and it had something to do with doubling up the outer rows and keeping them centered on the pillars. Randy also got some “L” brackets to anchor the floor joists to the pillars so the houses wouldn’t fall off during the next earthquake. Real heavy “L” brackets, not that junk you see at the hardware store. These were made out of what looked to be 2½”-3” angle iron. Guess they’d just have to wait for the next earthquake to find out, huh? They had enough of those brackets to put 2 per pillar and 4 on the corner pillars.

Randy got the backhoe with the loader mounted on front, a trencher/excavator to cut in the channels for the utilities and the septic field lines and when they were absolutely

certain that they hadn't forgotten anything, they went back up the hill for the final time for a while. They also got several rolls of linoleum.

"We need to build a jig and prefabricate the trusses for the roofs," Randy said. "We'll build all of the trusses first and stack them. Then, when we're ready to build the cabins, we can frame them up in a couple of days, close them in with the plywood, add the windows and doors and have something unfinished but habitable in less than a week. I figure about 45 days to get the fifteen cabins all framed up and closed in. Then, we can start on one end and work our way to the other finishing of the interiors. There are 7 of us, 5 men and two near men. I'll run the backhoe and trencher and the boys can help me put in the septic system and the utilities. The four of you can build the floors, drop in the insulation, and cover the floors with plywood and then frame."

Of course the next day was Thanksgiving, November 24, 2005.

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Thanksgiving, November 24th...

"Lord we thank you for this day, the fine company, friends and family and for our lives. We ask your forgiveness for the things we took from others without being able to pay for them. We pray that if Jennifer and Joey's parents are ok that the family be reunited. We thank you for the food. Amen"

"Let's eat," Steve said. "Where did you find the turkey?"

"In the freezer, Steve, they had them on clearance a long time ago and I loaded up," Sandy replied. "They were the oversized birds that nobody seemed to want."

"I saw some traffic on the I-10, this morning," Sergeant announced. "Military convoy."

"Took them long enough," Marty said. "It will be 5 weeks tomorrow since the balloon went up."

"We'll, if they went to a shelter the same as we all did," Sergeant pointed out, "They wouldn't have come out until we did around the 4th or 5th of November. That means that it only took them 3 weeks, Marty."

"I expect that now that the military is here, people are going to start coming out of their holes," Jack noted.

"Those that survived will," Steve agreed. "Good and bad."

"Maybe we could get a couple of people building those trusses Randy wants and the rest of us can start building the cabin floors," Jack suggested. "Make any difference to you Randy, which way we do it?"

“No, you can probably put in one floor a day,” Randy said. “Two fellas can build those trusses we need in a couple of weeks and I can have all of the utilities installed in about the same amount of time. Sure, do it that way.”

“How about we frame in 5 cabins at a time?” Steve suggested. “We could maybe have 5 of them framed in by the middle of December and almost 3 finished up inside by the first of the year.”

“We’ll put Marty, Selma, Sissy and Marty in the first house we finish,” Jack went on. “Then Sergeant, Beth, Sandra and Billy in the second. Moira, Jennifer, Joey and I will take the third and Randy and Belinda the fourth.”

“There are going to be a couple of months that it will probably be too cold to work outside, Like January and February,” Randy observed, so that should work out and we’ll have one spare cabin if anyone shows up.”

“If we get some warm days, we can continue framing,” Jack suggested. “That way if we get more than one family all we’ll have to do is go back and finish a house. It should only take about 30 working days to frame the other 10 cabins. And if we get a cold snap, we can retreat and work inside finishing off the ones we have framed in.”

After dinner, they put a movie on TV, but the men mostly huddled around the radio listening to the communications that were now coming from all over the county. From what they could tell, and it wasn’t something that anyone agreed on, the death toll in the US included ‘at least’ one-third of the population in the initial attack. If they were to apply the empirical evidence from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that would be about half of the total death toll in the US. In the 5 years following those 1945 attacks, the number fatalities doubled from effects tied back to the bombings, an easily verified historical fact. That would put the death toll in the United States at a mind-boggling 200 million by 2010.

Any way you sliced the pie, when TSHTF, it was TEOCAWKI. Many nations in the history of the world were super powers: the Greeks, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Romans, The Spanish and even Great Britain when Britannia ruled the waves. Which one of those was the superpower now? We all know fame is always fleeting, even for super powers. At least the US had its turn at bat. It didn’t really matter who started the shooting match did it? He fired first; we fired back but, so what? There was that well known doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction that came into play. It works just as well the other way around. We fired first, he fired back and everybody dies. Kind of gets you right here, doesn’t it? It would never happen the pundits said (prayed). And another rock from space will never strike the earth and Yellowstone will never erupt, again. Never say never.

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Friday, November 25th...

Normally, the day after Thanksgiving is the busiest shopping day of the year. Retailers count on it. Just a year before in 2004, Wal-Mart had screwed the pooch and didn't advertise or run a lot of specials when everyone else had. Somehow, one gets the impression that good old Wally World wouldn't be having any sales on this day after Thanksgiving either.

Randy got busy designing and building the jig for the trusses. Marty and Sergeant helped him because they were designated to hammer the trusses together once the jig was built. Billy and Marty helped Jack and Steve start the first cabin floor. With the portable generators powering portable compressors, and using pneumatic nail guns the men could throw the frame together as fast as the boys could haul the 2x10's. They squared it up, added the caps and inserted the frame members every 4'. Over this they laid down a layer of plywood, the first of 2, to keep the critters out and topped that with a second frame of 2x6's running perpendicular to the 2x10's. It went very fast and by the end of the day, they had rolled in the R-19 insulation and covered it over with another layer of plywood.

Plumbing would come later, and would be accomplished by cutting holes wherever they were needed. At the moment, all they were doing was roughing it in. Randy had the jig completed and Marty and Sergeant were building trusses quickly. They made templates to mark the cuts on the lumber and speed the process even further. No one was wearing guns, but because of the people now appearing in the valley, rifles were kept handy.

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Saturday, November 26th...

They used the forklift to move bundles of precut studs up to the area of the first cabin. Not all of those 2x4's were precut studs, by the way. By noon, the exterior and interior walls were framed in. They broke for lunch and after lunch Randy used the loader on the front of the backhoe to lift bundles of trusses to the roof. When enough were on top, Randy went back to trenching. Did I mention that Moira and Sandy were helping today? Oops. They helped lift the framing up into place after it was constructed on the floor of the cabin and steady it while Steve and Jack nailed it into place. The ladies also helped to steady the trusses as Jack and Steve positioned them and tacked on a 1x4 to keep them uniformly spaced until the plywood went on. By the end of the day, the plywood had been put on the roofs and the new cabin was fairly sturdy.

For his part, Randy had the trenches dug for all of the utilities near the cabins. Billy and Marty had hauled the schedule 40 drain lines, laid out lengths of galvanized pipe for the water lines and conduit to carry phone lines and another to carry electrical lines. Solar powered or not, they still needed back up power for when the sun didn't shine. But with their 3 generators they only had a total of 54kw available, right? $30+12+12$, as I recall. $54 \div 16 = 3.375\text{kw}$ per home, about 28 amps. They needed something on the order of a 400kw generator to furnish electricity for all of the homes for a central system or, 14

more of the RS 30000 generators and a whole lot of propane. Well, again as I recall, they had 12 propane delivery trucks, each holding 3,000-gallons of propane. Plus they had Jack and Moira's 5,000-gallon propane tank on a trailer and lots of 100# propane bottles.

"The way I see it," Marty said, "Is that we get 3 more of the propane delivery trucks and some of those residential standby generators. Everyone can park a truck behind his cabin to supply propane for the cabin and generator."

"The way I see it," Randy said, "Is that we use the propane bottles for emergencies and plumb propane from a central source to all of the homes. I don't care if we have individual generators or a central generator."

"I have a better idea," Jack announced. "We'll all go down to the valley tomorrow and see what we can find. Since the military is here, I guess it might be wise to dress in our uniforms. We'll leave the boys at home to avoid any questions."

"We can't do that, Jack," Steve said.

"Can't do what?"

"Go down to the valley tomorrow and see what we can find," Steve said, "That makes too much sense."

What they found, when they checked the yellow pages, was that the nearest Cummings Power dealer used to be in Irvine. That wouldn't do at all. Irvine had had some unusual cloud formations back in October around the 21st. They also found a company in Fontana named Associated Power that carried all kinds of MQ WhisperWatt generators in sizes up to 1875kva. Fontana is right next to Rancho Cucamonga if you don't know the area.

Jack recalculated their power needs based on Moira and he having an RS 30000 generator that put out 100+ amps at 240v and discovered 16 cabins would require about 480kw. He hoped they had enough in stock.

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Sunday, November 27th...

Sunday is as good as any other day to steal a generator. Maybe better, some of the stores are closed. Oh, that's right, all of the stores were closed. Well, maybe the stores were closed but the military was out in force. They were all four in one pickup pulling a trailer. They waived and smiled at the soldiers and went on their way. There was a soldier standing guard at the Associated Power location in Fontana and he didn't seem to be too impressed with their Deputy Sheriff uniforms.

“Y’all stay back now,” the soldier said.

“Where y’all from soldier?” Jack asked.

“Mississippi.”

“Well boy, y’all just stand back now, y’hear,” Jack responded. “My name is Bubba an me and the boys gonna pick ourselves up some equipment at this here store.”

“Yessir Bubba,” the soldier said. “Say you related to the Bubba we got back home?”

“We’re all related soldier,” Jack said sternly. “My cousin Bubba hard to get along with?”

“No sir, he’s real mellow like,” the soldier said.

“Oh, he comes from THAT side of the family, huh?” Jack went on. “Why my aunt Em...”

“His maw’s name is Lucy, Bubba,” the soldier interrupted.

“Get ‘em confused sometimes boy, there’s so many of us,” Jack continued. “Anyway, as I was saying, my aunt Lucy is downright ashamed of that boy what with having a name like Bubba and being so mellow.”

“Yessir, Bubba,” the soldier replied.

“Step aside soldier,” Jack said.

“Yessir Bubba,” he replied.

Improvise. Adapt. Overcome. Sergeant, Marty and Steve were laughing so hard at Jack’s ‘act’ that they almost missed him waiving them on. What they found was four new, 120kw single phase generators with a prime power rating of 150kva/120kw. Nice, except they were diesel not propane. And, Bubba even got the soldier to help them load the units and an automatic transfer switches.

“Say hey to yer maw fer me when you see her boy,” Jack thanked the soldier.

“Yessir Bubba,” the soldier replied.

Big John – Chapter 15 – Building Frenzy

Some soldiers just don't seem to have any luck. Then again, when your 5'9 and a 6'6 Bubba is standing over you trying to sound like a good old southern boy instead of a fella from Los Angeles, you can get intimidated and cooperative. Especially when Bubba is backed up by 3 more guys in Deputy uniforms and carrying guns. Looked like the real thing, too. Never mind that Bubba didn't sound just right, it probably came from him living out here in Kalifornia, the land of fruits and nuts. It was nice of Bubba to say hey to mama, too. Nah, that was just something papa said when he was drunk and feeling mean. Best not mention it to the Sergeant; he might not know anyone named Bubba.

The 4 men were still chuckling when they got to the cabin. They tried to repeat the story, but it lost some of its flavor if you weren't there. Randy saw the four large generators and the matter was resolved. He told them to leave them on the trailer and he'd grade a spot where they could quickly pour a slab to hold the two new generators and if they could quit laughing long enough, they could get a couple of those mixers fired up and mix up a few of batches of concrete and build some forms. Each mixer would do about ½ yard of concrete; they were big suckers. They couldn't load those 1-yard jobs, they had to be towed and they already had their trailers.

There were four nice pieces of 2x6 left over from the earlier forms and Steve and Jack put together a form while Sergeant and Marty got the concrete mixing. It didn't have to be real fancy anyway. They kept mixing concrete and screeding it off until they had the slab poured. They figured they'd better let it dry for several days, considering the temperature. It wasn't Sackrete anyway; it was Quikrete commercial grade concrete mix. The manual for the generators said they burned 8.6gph at full load, but they would probably never get to full load.

“What do you mean diesel?”

“Didn't you read the manual?”

“Yeah, it said 8.6gph at full power times 4 equals 34.4gph.”

“Of diesel, not propane.”

“I guess we have a lifetime supply of propane and had better start looking for diesel and PRI-D.”

“Each is rated at 360 amps at 240v giving us 1,440 amps for 16 cabins, leaving us about 160 amps at 240v short. They were two more there, maybe we should get them and look for diesel tanks and fuel later.”

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Monday, November 28th...

“Hey Bubba, how’s it going?”

“Hey Bubba, not so hot.”

“Trouble boy?”

“Sergeant was right upset about those 4 generators.”

“That’s our fault Bubba, we waz supposed to pick up six not four. Got my tailed chewed good I did. Need to get 2 more, 2 more automatic transfer switches and a synchronizer. Get the gate for me boy.”

“Yessir Bubba.”

Meanwhile back at the mountain, during the morning they put up the plywood under sheath on the walls. This allowed them to begin installing the windows and doors. Randy was using the backhoe to dig the hole for the septic tanks. The general arrangement of the cabins was all going to be the same. They faced to the south almost overlooking the valley below. Almost because Randy would need to grade off one small hill if they wanted the view. Now, grading off that small hill wouldn’t really cause a problem. Randy could just push the dirt over the edge where it would fall several hundred feet to the canyon below. Only a skilled mountain climber could come from that way and that was risky because of the looseness of the rock. Or, so they thought.

If there was anything, security wise, to be concerned about it was that fire road that they used to get to the cabin. They packed it down pretty well and it was just a bare dirt road that showed two grooves, the vehicle tracks. Since they had the pipes all laid out for the utilities, they decided to send Billy and Marty to the top of the road to keep an eye out for anyone starting up that fire road. The boys were old enough to carry guns and they knew how to use them if they had to. However, that wasn’t the plan. The plan was simply to get the boys to maintain a lookout. And in this task, they behaved very responsibly.

It continued this way until they had all five cabins roughed in and closed up. That ended up taking them until well into December. Each cabin turned out to take about 3½ working days to get to that particular stage. About because after Sergeant and Marty finished building enough trusses, they pitched in and lowered the average number of days. Marty and Sergeant were using those metal straps that had the little prongs punched out and it was easy to build a truss using nothing but a blacksmith’s hammer or small maul. They’d cut enough lumber to build the trusses for a single cabin and then slap them together, bam, bam and bam.

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Monday, December 12th...

“Ok guys,” Randy announced, “Here’s where it gets interesting. The next things we have to do are install the plumbing, insulate the walls and install the electricity. After that, we can put up the paneling and lay the linoleum. Then, it’s just a matter of putting in the plumbing and electrical fixtures and finishing off the kitchen area. We’re just going to use that 8” double wall stovepipe and 8” class “A” chimney system and vent through the wall. That will reduce the number of holes in the roof. I intend to vent the plumbing out the roof with a system vent rather than fixture vents. We’ll only have one pipe we have to flash and shingle around.”

“Who is going to do the shingles?” Jack asked.

“I have no idea, do you want to?” Randy replied.

“I’d rather keep my feet on the ground if you don’t mind,” Jack smiled.

“I’ll do it,” Steve volunteered.

“No you won’t,” Jack responded. “We’re going to need you to set the legs of the people who do fall off.”

“I won’t fall off for crying out loud,” Steve replied.

“Say someone trips you and you fall and break a leg or arm,” Jack suggested. “Do you want Sergeant or Marty to set the bone?”

“Ok, you win,” Steve chuckled, “No offense fellas.”

It took 10 days to finish the first home inside and out. Probably was a good thing that it didn’t snow, huh? It was taking longer than they planned, but the finished product was something to behold. Marty, Selma, Sissy and Marty got what they wanted for Christmas, a new home. The stove was temporarily being run off of bottle gas because they didn’t have all of the equipment they needed for a centralized propane delivery system. They hadn’t buried the gas pipe in any event so they put them back in storage and filled in the trench. They were running that generator too, because the solar panels were going to have to wait until spring.

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Thursday, December 22nd...

They decided not to start on Sergeant’s home just yet; Sandy had another turkey thawing out because Sunday was Christmas. So, they got the ladies to make up Christmas lists, got in their uniforms and headed down below. Their first stop was at Associated Power where they gave that good old boy from Mississippi a fruit cake and a bottle of booze because he was so far from home and helped them out so much. They didn’t really need to give him the booze; the fruitcake had enough in it to give you a real good

buzz. Fruitcake is the preferred gift because it holds well, in case you're wondering. 'Bubba' stayed in the cab and let Steve make the delivery because he couldn't ruin his image; who knows, they might need something else.

Fortunately they had a 'prisoner' when they went down the mountain to do Christmas shopping. It was raggedy 6' tall gal who managed a few appropriate cusses when the military was around. When they weren't, Moira picked out the items on the lists with 'Bubba' guarding her and toting the packages. First came the little kids, Joey and Jennifer. They got lots of clothing but only a few toys from Toys R Us and a whole assortment of board games. Next came the teenagers and they got clothing and whatever CD Albums Moira could find from the list. Moira also picked up clothing for the women as presents from their husbands and some other items they needed but weren't necessarily Christmas gifts, like underwear. And good ole 'Bubba' just kept hauling things to the pickup.

"Hey Bubba how ya doing there boy?" Marty teased.

"Marty, you got a bad case of memory?" Steve whispered.

"Here Jack, let me help you with those," Marty offered.

Finally, Moira shopped for the men, at least for their outer clothing. She told them to go find their own underwear. Finally in one mall they came across a knife shop that carried Cold Steel knives. They just happened to have a supply of the Cold Steel Laredo Bowies, probably ordered in for the Christmas season. They had a whole dozen of the moderately expensive knives to be specific. The Inland Empire was also the home of several members of the Single Action Shooting Association (SASS). Steve hit a couple of their stores and picked up some original Ruger Vaquero's and leather. Sergeant went for some rifles for the two boys, nice Winchester model 70 Classic Featherweight in 7.62x51mm. He got Sandra and Sissy something a little milder, but just as nice, Winchester model 70 Classic Featherweight in the .270 Winchester. Plus all of the .270 Winchester ammo he could find. There were other gifts the men got for their wives, usually something personal like her favorite perfume or something she'd mentioned to him. Marty found a store that sold Leatherman's (Charge Ti) and he got those. They also grabbed a bunch of 20# propane cylinders and some propane camping stoves. Many of the gifts were obviously of a practical nature. Many, but not all; the mall had a Victoria's Secret store, too. They called it a day and escorted their 'prisoner' back up the mountain.

"Say, didn't your guys just come through here this morning with the same prisoner?"

"Nah, Sergeant, that was her twin sister," Sergeant told the Sergeant.

"Can I see your ID's please?" the Sergeant asked. "Well hell, you really are Deputy Sheriff's, I thought you were trying to pull a fast one. Go ahead, can't keep the wheels of justice from turning, now can we? Say, what's in the back of the truck?"

“Rifles, ammunition and Christmas presents for some of the people stationed at the Twin Peaks Station,” Sergeant replied. “You keep your eye out for looters.”

“Hey, that reminds me,” the Sergeant said. “You guys know anything about a long drink of water about the size of, what was it Jack?” Goes by the name of Bubba? Has himself and some buddies dressed up as Deputy Sheriff’s.”

“What did they do, this Bubba and his friends?” Sergeant asked.

“Stole 6 generators,” the Sergeant replied.

“Give us their pictures and descriptions and we’ll keep any eye out for them,” Sergeant suggested.

“Don’t have any pictures, just that one name, Bubba,” the Sergeant apologized.

“Then give us the descriptions,” Sergeant suggested.

“You can take my copy,” the Sergeant replied. “Appreciate the help, Deputies.”

“That’s our job, Sergeant, catching the crooks,” Sergeant continued. “We’re running late, get this pickup fired up. We got to get those Christmas presents delivered.”

Where did they get these guys? The Sergeant spoke with a pure Brooklyn accent, Mississippi and New York, apparently. On a whim, the Sergeant wrote down the plate number and ran it later. It came up as being registered to one Jack Douglas, a Reserve Officer with the SBS, 6’6 and 245, the big guy. He wadded the paper into a ball and missed the wastebasket.

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Friday, December 23rd...

They were frankly exhausted. They’d been driving nails, sawing wood and so forth since the day after Thanksgiving. They had pillars in for 15 homes, 5 framed and 1 of the 5 completed. They had resolved to run the homes using bottle gas because they didn’t want to figure out how to set up a centralized propane distribution system. The electricity was centralized and currently being used. The pitch of the roofs was perfect to mount the solar panels on come spring. When they stopped and added up how much stabilized diesel they had and compared it to the amount of fuel they’d burn until they could get the solar in, it suddenly came to them that they had a problem.

They’d seen a Chevron tanker parked in a truck park and checked it out. It was two 8,000-gallon tanks of diesel, but the tractor was dead. They had been so busy and they already had so much fuel they hadn’t worried about it. Things change. They went down

and got that semi-tractor from the pillar place, went to the truck park where the tanker was parked, switched the tractors with more than a little difficulty and headed home with 16,000-gallons of diesel fuel. The fuel was over 2 months old and probably needed a dose of PRI-D before they could burn it but they had more than doubled the amount of diesel fuel available. It wasn't cold enough that the diesel in the tanker was in danger of gelling. However, before they moved the vehicles, they added 4 gallons each of PRI-D to each of the 8,000-gallon tanks, figuring that the journey up the mountain would help to mix the additive with the fuel.

"We've had our share of false starts," Jack admitted.

"It doesn't matter, Jack," Randy replied. "We'll have the cabins finished by the end of January or early February. There's plenty of food, fuel and the things we need to survive for a long time. I'm bored, I'm going to go knock off that little hill into the canyon to improve the view from the homes."

"Yeah, we can keep a better eye on the valley down below," Steve added, "Go for it."

Jack was tired enough that the obvious didn't occur to him. If they could see the valley, the valley could see them. At least at night when they had the lights on, they could be seen. Even people who do security for a living can miss things, especially when they're tired. It only took Randy about 3 hours to grade the entire hill into the canyon. When he was finished, Marty and Selma could see the valley from their new home and everyone else could see the valley from Steve and Sandy's.

When the day comes, as it surely must, when you find yourself in a survival situation, will you be totally prepared? Even if you have all sorts of preparations and know how to utilize everything you have, will you truly be prepared? Or, will you make a series of false starts as you adapt to the situation that faces you? Joke all you want, but there was some good advice freely given a few years ago. *Improvise. Adapt. Overcome.* It was just a line out of a movie, but it was the best advice anyone could give you. Use your head for something besides holding your hat.

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Saturday, December 24th...

Nobody bothered wrapping packages because they didn't have any wrapping paper and it was foolish anyway. You spent hours wrapping packages only to see the expensive wrapping paper wadded up in a trash bag after the presents had been passed around and opened. It was just as easy to keep your presents in the bags you'd brought them home in and act like Santa Claus delving into his pack for everyone's presents; more fun, too. They had time to check out the condition of the 4 cabins that had only been roughed in and closed up.

"I think we'll have everyone in a home by the end of January," Randy announced. "We're getting rested over this weekend and maybe we'll even take Monday off. Jack, what's the security situation?"

"I should have never let you grade that hill into the canyon, Randy," Jack replied, "But I was too tired to think. Steve got what he wanted, advertising. It's unlikely that anyone will come at us from the front because of the canyon. Most likely their first line of approach would be to come at us using the fire road on our left flank. However, someone with determination could come at us from the east, north or west."

"Any ideas how we can protect ourselves?" Sergeant asked.

"It may sound funny, but a drawbridge on that road would stop vehicles," Jack suggested. "We don't have a lot of options when it comes to building one, so maybe we could build one about 12' long using 2x12's on their edge and sort of laminate them together. It should hold most of the loads we'd bring across the bridge."

"And, we could stick a couple of pipes in the ground to give us the leverage to raise and lower the bridge," Randy added. "But, I think we'd be better off if we built the bridge out of "I" beams and used some $\frac{3}{4}$ " metal plate. We gave that good ole boy from Mississippi a nice Christmas present and there were all kinds of portable welders at Associated Power. Grab a couple of bottles and we'll get ourselves the welder."

They dressed in the uniforms and headed down the mountain. Guess who was at the checkpoint?

"Hey Sergeant, how's it going?" Sergeant asked.

"They tell me that the Twin Peaks Sheriff's station is closed," the Sergeant replied.

"That's right Sergeant, it is," Sergeant said. "Oh, were you under the impression that we were going to the station itself? Sorry if we gave that impression. It's on the other side of I-15 anyway. No, those packages and things were for the Deputies who live over on this side of the road and work at the Twin Peaks Station when it's open."

"I see," the Sergeant said. "What happened to the prisoner?"

"Darned shame, Sergeant," Sergeant replied. "She tried to escape and we had to shoot her."

"Where are you boys headed now?" the Sergeant asked.

"We're going to Fontana and pick up that welder that Jack here ordered before the crap hit the fan," Sergeant said.

"Oh? Where in Fontana?" the Sergeant asked.

“A place called... what was it called, Jack?” Sergeant replied.

“Associated Power,” Jack picked up his cue.

“Associated Power, Sergeant,” Sergeant finished.

“That’s where those phony Deputies stole those generators,” the Sergeant related.

“You don’t say?” Sergeant replied. “Small world, huh? How about a note for the guards you have posted so we don’t get shot?”

“Only have the one guard,” the Sergeant said. “It’s that boy from Mississippi that let Bubba and his friends drive off with 6 new generators. That boy is going to be a private forever and I’m making him guard that place on Christmas Eve. What else are you getting?”

“We’re supposed to pick up some “I” beams and of course we’re getting Jack’s welding rods,” Sergeant replied. “That’s all.”

“Here’s a pass in case anyone stops you,” the Sergeant said offering a piece of paper.

“Thanks, Sergeant,” Sergeant said. “Boys isn’t there a bottle somewhere in the pickup we could give to the Sergeant?”

“Here you go,” Steve said passing a bottle of Maker’s Mark to Sergeant.

“Merry Christmas Sergeant,” Sergeant said. “We’ll be coming back this way in a couple of hours.”

“Hey thanks fellas, Merry Christmas,” the Sergeant said.

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“Hey, Bubba,” the soldier said. “I got my chest in a wringer giving you those generators. I’m going to be standing this here post until Kingdom Come.”

“Boy, it must have been a mix-up in the paperwork,” ‘Bubba’ replied. “I got you covered this time, though. We have a note from your Sergeant.”

“Ok, great, whatcha here ta git?” the soldier asked.

“A welder and rods, boy,” ‘Bubba’ replied. “You take down the number on this here note from the Sergeant so’s you don’t git in no more trouble. I brung ya somethin.” Jack said handing the bottle to the boy from Mississippi.

“Hey, thanks, Bubba,” the soldier said opening the gate.

“Say hey to yer maw fer me when you see her boy,” Jack thanked the soldier.

They picked up a nice welder, one that Randy recommended and a whole lot of the welding rods that he’d told them to get. Then, they headed out to pick up a few “I” beams. Fontana Steel seemed like a likely place, but they only manufactured rebar. They found 5 12’ “I” beams at a metal distributors and loaded them on the pickup. There were several sheets of the ¾” plate up at the cabin leftover from building the shelter. Fontana Steel, by the way, was diversified. A few years earlier, they’d bought the country western radio station in Palmdale and had converted it to a Spanish language station. KUTY, 1470AM, Unica-Spanish News-Talk.

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Sunday, December 25th... Christmas 2005...

Nice day with presents being passed out and homemade cinnamon rolls and plenty of hot coffee to go with them. Jack had enough of those Bowie knives to give everyone a knife and put up 2 for Jennifer and Joey. The boys were excited about the new model 70 rifles, but Sissy and Sandra weren’t. The CD’s went over well, however. Those special gifts the men got the wives at places like Victoria’s Secrets weren’t forth coming. They would probably be given that evening, away from prying eyes. Stay tuned for another episode of Sex and the Survivalists, but don’t hold your breath.

There was plenty of turkey and fixings for 12½ people, but there weren’t any leftovers. Make that 15 people, Belinda was eating like a teenaged boy.

“We gonna keep working on the houses or stop and put in the drawbridge?” Sergeant asked.

“I’ll take Billy and Marty to help me,” Randy suggested, “And we’ll use the backhoe to dig the gully. “I’m not much of a welder, but I can get by. We’ll put in the concrete bridge abutments and plant the posts when we pour the concrete. It will take most of the Quikrete we have, but we should be able to get it done in a couple of weeks. Wish I had a couple of winches to raise and lower the bridge.”

“Take the ones off of Moira’s and my pickups,” Jack suggested. “We can get replacements the next time we go to the valley.”

“I suppose we can use deep cycle batteries to power the winches and run an electric line down to chargers to recharge the batteries,” Steve proposed. “We have more batteries than we need for 15 cabins anyway.”

“Why not find some solar chargers for those batteries?” Jack suggested. “If we’re going to get replacement winches, we’d be better off starting with new winches at the bridge. I don’t think our winches are heavy enough.”

“Have something in mind?” Randy asked.

“If the posts are 12’ tall, we’ll have a 1:1 mechanical advantage,” Jack replied. “I don’t know how much 5 “I” beams and a plate of steel $\frac{3}{4}$ ” thick and 12’ square weighs, but a bunch I’d imagine. We could get 2 of those Mile Marker E12000 electric winches to use if we can find them.”

“Jack, $\frac{3}{4}$ ” steel plate weighs 30.63 pounds per square foot,” Randy explained. “The bridge deck will weigh about, uh, 4,411 pounds. The W10x “I” beams we got weigh about 15 pounds per lineal foot. That makes another 900 pounds for a total of about 5,311 pounds. We’re going to need to fabricate hinges, but they won’t add much to the load.”

“They make a solar powered 30-watt battery charger,” Sergeant said. “They use them on boats to recharge trolling batteries. “We can find a couple of those to recharge the batteries. And if we have plenty of batteries, we can wire a pair in parallel on each side so we have plenty of juice.”

These guys should really consider moving back to the valley. Everything they seemed to need was down there, wasn’t it? True, but they were getting closer and closer counts in this case. Besides, they needed to say Hi (not Hey) to their old friend the Sergeant.

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Monday, December 26th...

“What are you boys up to?” the Sergeant asked.

“Picking up an order of 2 solar chargers and 2 vehicle winches,” Sergeant replied.

“Say, where do you boys live?” the Sergeant asked.

“Palmdale, Sergeant,” Sergeant replied, “We came in the back way.”

“What are 4 Deputies for the SBSB doing living in Los Angeles County?” the Sergeant asked.

“They relaxed the rules,” Sergeant replied.

“Really?” the Sergeant said. “Drive careful.”

It was an adventure coming up with the solar chargers and electric winches, but they managed. Randy explained that they could set the winches a 'ways back' and protect them with a steel plate. Jack wondered aloud what was to prevent someone from cutting the cables and Randy said that they could rig a remote controlled lock that would lock the bridge in place if it were raised, which was to be its normal position. The bridge would help with their eastern exposure, but what about the north and west? The nearest road to the west was Mt. Baldy road and it was maybe 6 miles off. The only road to the north was Lytle Creek Road. There were numerous fire roads off of Lytle Creek Road, way too many to worry about for the moment.

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Friday, January 4, 2006...

In the 10 days or so it took to complete Sergeant and Beth's cabin, Randy and the two boys completed the gully, poured the bridge abutments and created the bridge in place. The winches had 100' of cable, but Randy only set the winches back about 30'. The cable was routed through some 2" galvanized water pipe from the winch up to the pulley where it ran up to the top of the pole. That pulley was set in a block of concrete that was 2 cubic yards and weighed a bunch, about 3,500 pounds per yard or 7,000 pounds per block. The pulley wasn't going to pull out of the block and the block was really only supporting half of about 5,300 pounds. The bridge protected the cable that ran from that pulley so they didn't protect the cable. And there was no way they could protect the cable that lifted the bridge itself. After numerous tests to make certain that the drawbridge drew smoothly each and every time, Randy pronounced the bridge to be completed. Lacking radio controls to activate the locks, Randy came up with a scheme that required one person to be on the uphill side of the bridge.

Everyone stopped when the second cabin was finished on the previous day and they spent Friday helping Sergeant, Elizabeth (Beth), Sandra and Billy move into the cabin. Two down and 3 more to go until they could stop and rough in the next 5 cabins, that was some progress. It looked as if Randy's prediction about them all being in a home by the end of the month was going to hold true. They took the weekend off since they'd worked through the previous weekend and they were all tired.

Each cabin went like the previous and on January 20th, Jack, Moira, Jennifer and Joey moved into their new home. They took the weekend off again and on the 23rd of January started on Randy and Belinda's home. They missed the deadline by a couple of days with the final move occurring on February 3rd. By February 17th, the fifth cabin was complete and furnished from the materials they'd gathered from the valley. They talked it over and decided to rough in the next 10 cabins all at once and then go back and finish them one by one. In fact, the general plan was to finish the 10 cabins, rough in the plumbing, do the roofs, and weather permitting, install the solar panels on all 15 cabins so they could shut down the generator. And then, and only then, finish the cabins.

To avoid any confusion that might arise, Jack and Moira coached Jennifer and Joey to just call them Jack and Moira. It now appeared that the children were here to stay, it had been 4 months since the attack had come and if the parents were going to show up, surely they would have by now. Jennifer seemed satisfied, contented or whatever that her mommy and daddy were with grandma and Moira didn't push the point or even bring up the subject. Having new rooms all of their own seemed to satisfy the children anyway. Mostly. Sometimes late at night, Moira thought she heard Jennifer sobbing but whenever she went to check, Jennifer was always asleep and so was Joey. Maybe they had a ghost!

There was still the matter of people contacting them and asking them to lower the bridge. Two days a month, they went down to the valley and went 'shopping'. On one of these trips they found surplus sound powered telephone equipment in a surplus store that still worked. It wasn't left over from WW II either; it was current government surplus, perhaps from a ship or a mine. They got enough 16 unit stations to wire the cabins together and a 6 unit set up to connect the bridge to Steve and Sandy's cabin and the shelter.

Big John – Chapter 16 – A World Gone Crazy

Hollywood producers and directors usually set their Armageddon Movies about a nuclear holocaust at the scene of the death and destruction. There was death everywhere but the destruction was limited to places where the warheads fell, over to the west a ways. You could see where the LA skyline used to be, but the skyline was jagged and torn. Still, you couldn't really see the destruction because standing there on the mountain you were a long ways from downtown LA. Add to that the fact that the Inland Empire hadn't taken a direct hit and the scene below you was surreal. There were thousands of undamaged buildings, mostly devoid of life.

On the occasions that they did get to the valley – they'd finally pulled the roadblock – there were more and more people every time. A scant few of the business establishments were reopening but many were closed for good. Either the owner was dead, or the business was a corporation that was unable to get goods to sell. There didn't seem to be much business for some of the building trades either, except to the west. They heard around that the SBSB was reformed but wasn't out looking for its officers. Deputies and employees who showed up at the Central Station were put back to work or not, depending upon whether they wanted work or just stopping by to say Hi. There seemed to be a whole new set of rules.

Jack, Steve, Marty, Sergeant and Randy were in no hurry to go back to work in the valley. They were intent on finishing the cabins and moving in a few select individuals to share their small retreat. They continued to work and by Friday, April 28th had the 10 cabins roughed in along with the plumbing and the roofs on. On the following Monday, May 1, 2006, they would start installing the solar panels, batteries and inverters. Their best guess was that it would take 3 days per home or 30 working days. They were going to work 6 days per week and try to have everything done by Friday, June 2nd, 2006. After that, they were going to take time to level a spot and plant a garden. They'd come into the possession of 2 rototillers and 2 truck and trailer loads of steer manure that they could till into the soil. They had all of the vegetables in those #10 cans that they gotten from Walton Feed in the time before TEOCAWKI. They had added additional varieties to their store of goods in the form of seeds.

Since they were at some elevation, over 6,000', they focused on finding seeds that would work at high altitude and were labeled heirloom. They had literally dozens of varieties to plant. They also had a large store, now, of canning jars and lids. Each family had a canner and there were more stored in the second shed. The second shed was identical to the first and held their plunder or purchases if you prefer. At least they were honest with themselves about that; it was plunder pure and simple. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Sandy had made up a new calendar on her laptop that started with October 22 as day 1 PT (Post TEOCAWKI). There was no way that life would ever get back to 'normal' or what passed for normal in the days up to and including October 21, 2005. The new calendar showed the Gregorian date as well as the PT day number. Some might choose to view the system as a new variation on the Julian calendar that began Monday, January 1, 4713 BCE. 22Oct05, Day 1 PT was Julian day

number 2,453,666. To convert from Julian to PT, take the Julian Day number and subtract 2,453,665. The significance of the fact that the new method of reckoning came on a Julian Day that included the number 666 was not lost on anyone. Was this the beginning of the 1,000-years?

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Friday, June 2, 2006... Day 224 PT...

Eureka! On this Friday, they managed to finish the solar installations on schedule and were finally able shut down the generator. The silence was deafening. Randy had graded a level spot equal to about ½ acre and they could use it all or as much of it as they wanted. An acre is 220 yards long by 22 yards wide. As a square, it is 207.7 feet square. Their garden was about ½ acre or about 2,420 square yards. It was 103' wide by 219' long and had 72 100' rows spaced 3' apart with 1½' of clear space on either end of the rows and on both ends of the garden. This would allow them to cultivate the garden with the rototiller.

Botanical potato seeds are slightly smaller than tomato seeds, and therefore require far less space compared to the traditional potato tubers. You will no longer have to handle the bulky seed tubers from the past. The botanical potato seeds will also keep their vigor for several years, when stored under the correct conditions, unlike the traditional seed-tuber potatoes which can easily rot away, or get eaten by rodents and other animals alike. Because the botanical seed is so light and easy to transport, the shipping costs are much lower than for conventional tubers. Besides the higher transport costs, potato seed tubers are easily bruised and damaged during loading and transport on trailers. Botanical potato seeds face none of these problems.

Another thing you can do is save those eyes that the missus cuts out of the potatoes. As long as you don't cut into the eye itself, they'll grow. They raked the ground and laid out rows with a string and stakes. They were going to have a large productive garden. It only took a few days to plant. The boys were assigned to the task of using the rototiller to keep the garden tilled and the weeds knocked down. Now at 7-8 days per house, they would have the houses done by the end of August. Green beans mature in about 55 days, give or take. And, they had lots of green beans and everything else. They got 6 additional houses completed before they had to begin to take time off to help the wives harvest the garden, giving them 7 EMPTY cabins. Build it and they will come... (Field of Dreams) ISAIAH 54:11-17 But, they didn't come, despite the advertising lights of the homes. Not at first at least. And, when during the month of July 2006 they did come, it was the wrong they.

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Wednesday, July 12, 2006... Day 264 PT...

"Who is it and what do you want?" Sandy asked when she answered the gate phone.

“San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department, ma’am,” the voice responded.

“What can I do for you Deputy?” Sandy asked.

“Lower the drawbridge, Lady,” the Deputy replied.

“It’s a manual system, Deputy, I’ll have to send someone down,” Sandy advised.

“Ok, lady, I’ll wait,” the Deputy said.

Doesn’t sound like a Deputy to me, and it didn’t sound like a Deputy to Sandy. She went and got the men and the 5 men and the 2 boys went down towards the gate. There were maybe 15 of them and they had patrol cars and were wearing uniforms. SBSB uniforms to be exact. Except that they didn’t look like Deputy Sheriff’s. Sergeant took a pair of binoculars and scanned the crowd. With 25 years with the SBSB, Sergeant knew half to two-thirds of the members of the Department. You would think that out of 15 people, he would have recognized at least one of them but he didn’t. Sergeant handed the binos to Steve and he didn’t know them either. The same went for Marty. And, stained uniforms and faces needing a shave didn’t speak well for the Department. It was time to send Bubba down toting an M16A3/M203.

“My name is Bubba, can I help you?” Jack asked.

“San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department,” the man called across the gully. “Lower the drawbridge.”

“For what purpose?” Jack asked.

“We have to inspect your property,” the ‘Deputy’ replied.

“For what purpose?” Jack asked.

“You know, mister,” the ‘Deputy’ said. “Congress passed that new law outlawing firearms and we came to collect yours.”

“I don’t have any firearms,” Jack replied.

“What’s that thing you’re carrying, a BB gun?” the ‘Deputy’ asked.

“It’s my Crossman air rifle,” Jack replied. “Want a demonstration?”

“Mister, there are 15 of us and 1 of you, give it up,” the ‘Deputy’ continued.

Jack pulled his official Deputy’s whistle out of his pocket and blew one blast. A round kissed the ground right between the ‘Deputy’s’ feet. Steve had some of the M1A rifles

with suppressors, too. Everyone on the hill had a M1A or M16A3 rifle and all of the rifles were suppressed. Steve, Sergeant, Marty and Randy had the M1A's and Billy and Marty had the M16A3's. You know what they did for entertainment every other Saturday, right? It was a very nice 300-yard range, too.

Jack lobbed a 40mm grenade into the rear car blocking their escape. Then, he turned the rifle on the "Deputy" and introduced him to the fires of hell. Billy and Marty were lobbing grenades and the 3 Deputies and Randy were picking those "Deputies" off one by one. Jack had wisely stepped behind the drawbridge and he was safe. Killing 15 men doesn't take very long when you have the high ground and have a family to protect. Billy and Marty came down the hill whooping and hollering. Jack lowered the drawbridge and they surged across. And stopped. And puked. It was a little different up close than it was from 60-70 yards away. The smells weren't too pleasant either since some of the "Deputies" had voided.

At 180 feet, a man is just a target. At 5 feet, he is a dead human being. And much of the time he stinks. It had to come sometime and it wasn't very glamorous. Just two groups of men bent on killing each other if the situation called for it. And, on this day, it was called for. Randy went after the dozer while the men made certain there were no living witness to dispute their account of what happened. Randy used the dozer to clear the road and pushed open a depression in the ground at the bottom of the fire road down by Lytle Creek Road. They dumped the bodies in, after collecting the arms and ammunition, leather and badges. When Randy had the depression covered over and crossed back over the bridge, they raised it and returned to the house.

All of the pistols and semiautomatic M16 rifles belonged to the SBS, just as the uniforms had. Some of the uniforms hadn't had holes before today and some had patched holes with stains around them. All of that leather was standard issue Sam Browne, too. They got the leather, badges, handguns, shotguns and rifles and took the day off to settle themselves and clean all of the weapons. Many California Law Enforcement Agencies have USGI surplus M16A1 rifles that have been rendered incapable of automatic fire. The CHP now carries one in every car, or so I've been told. It's dangerous out there people, don't you kid yourselves.

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Sunday, July 23, 2006... Day 275 PT...

"Who is it and what do you want?" Sandy asked.

"My name is Matthew Johnson and I have my family here," the man replied. "Could you folks spare any food and water?"

"I'll have to send someone down to lower the drawbridge," Sandy replied.

"Thank you, we'll wait, anything will do," the man replied.

The drill was the same as before, 5 men and 2 boys headed to the road overlooking the drawbridge. What they saw this time was a man and a woman and 3 kids of varying ages from about 5 to about 10. It was time for Bubba to check them out.

“Can I help you?” Jack asked.

“Mister, my name is Matthew Johnson and this is my wife Emily,” Matt said. “We have been trying to get up into the mountains for a long time. The water is bad down below and food is hard to come by. If you could spare any food and water, I’d be mighty grateful. But, I’ll have to tell you right now, I don’t have any way to pay.”

“What did you do for a living, Matthew?” Jack asked.

“You mean before? I worked for a construction company. Why? Is that important?” Matt asked.

“I’ll lower the drawbridge,” Jack said. “Are you armed?”

“I have a .38 revolver but only 4 shells,” Matt replied.

“I’m a Reserve Deputy Sheriff with the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department, Matthew,” Jack replied. “Would you object to me holding your firearm?”

“Not at all, Deputy, I’ll put it on the ground,” Matt replied, a twinge of desperation and another of hope in his voice.

Jack lowered the drawbridge and picked up the revolver after he crossed. He patted Matt down and there was no other gun on him. He checked Emily’s purse and let it go at that. One wrong move out of these people would exact immediate reaction from the top of the hill. They crossed the bridge and he raised it back in place and locked it. He led them up to his home and made introductions as far as he could. Matt picked up from there and introduced the children. Sally was 11, Geena was 8 and little Matthew was 6.

Moira fixed up a meal from leftovers and it was more than obvious that they hadn’t eaten in a while. They didn’t quite wolf their food, but they came close. When they finished eating, the children went to play and the five adults engaged Matthew and Emily in separate conversations with the men in the main room and the ladies in the kitchen area. After the conversation, they were shown to cabin number five and offered its use for the night. The cupboards were stocked with a minimum of food, but enough for the family for 2-3 days.

With the Johnson family tucked away for the rest of the day and the night, the adults compared Matt’s story to Emily’s. There were no major differences, except perhaps from perspective. They’d survived in a jury rigged basement shelter and hadn’t come out for 3 weeks because they had no way to measure the radiation. They’d been able to

find food for quite a while at an Albertsons and a Stater Brothers, but eventually they had become increasingly picked over. There was no electricity or running water and they had resorted to hauling water to flush their stool and to boil to drink. They used their backyard gas grill until they ran out of propane, and had then resorted to burning the firewood they had for their fireplace. They had further resorted to living in the living room because that was where the fireplace was.

It was cool most nights but they mainly only used the firewood for cooking and bundled up in blankets instead. Slowly they exhausted all of the food they had taken from the grocery stores and finally, in desperation had looted a sporting goods store and taken what little bit they could find and set off to the mountains. They had a few packages of seeds, a shovel, an axe, sleeping bags, a few packages of trail mix that they'd exhausted and a few bottles of water, also exhausted. Matt was a finish carpenter. Most finish carpenters start as regular carpenters and eventually specialize, according to Randy. They took a vote and agreed unanimously to invite the Johnson family to permanently occupy cabin number 5. One down and ten to go.

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Thursday, August 3, 2006... Day 286 PT...

With the pair of extra hands, skilled hands at that, the cabins were finished ahead of schedule. As related, all of the cabins were essentially the same and had 3 bedrooms, a bathroom with shower, sink and stool, and a large room with the kitchen on one end and a dining room table with 6 chairs separating the kitchen area from the remainder of the main room. Each house had a bottle gas kitchen stove, an electric refrigerator and propane hot water heater, a wood heating stove, a sofa and a couple of chairs, some miscellaneous tables, a TV and a DVD/VCR player. There was also a wooden rifle rack, which could hold 4 long arms. There were some dishes and flatware and an assortment of kitchen utensils plus a coffee maker and a toaster as well as a set of pots and pans. An open cabinet in the bathroom held bathroom linens and there were linens in the kitchen. It was basic, but sufficient. The beds were stored in the second shed and supplied as needed along with chests of drawers and bed linens.

The first order of business, among other things, was to give a Sam Brown belt and pistol to Matt along with one of the semi auto M16's and a police shotgun. The pistol came with 2 spare 15 round magazines and 250 round of ammos . The M16 came with 13 30-round magazines and 2,000 rounds of ammo. The standard issue police shotgun came with 250-rounds of tactical buckshot. All of the DVD's and VHS tapes had been pooled at Steve and Sandy's and they had a loaner system.

Time was spent on the range and at the kitchen table teaching shooting and care of the weapons. It wouldn't be fair to say that Matt was any kind of a natural, but he was as good as the average guy in the Army. He learned the proper shooting techniques and how to strip and clean his weapons. A second .40 S&W was given to Emily and she was taught to use it and Matt's rifle and shotgun. Perhaps the assumption being that one

would use the rifle and the other the shotgun. They hadn't been to the valley for quite some time and it seemed appropriate to make a run and see what supplies were still available.

They went as a group and the group consisted of the six men plus Sandy, Moira, Beth and Emily. The boys and the other women stayed at the cabin to keep an eye on things and try to find time to harvest some of the late season vegetables and maybe do a little canning. They hit that knife shop right off and picked up some other Cold Steel knives and a sporting goods store where they found some ammo the military had missed plus some camping gear. They were pulling 3 trailers and two of the pickups were without trailers in case they found anything to tow. They remained in constant communication with the cabin using the police handy talkies.

They hit clothing stores and picked up what clothing they could find, preferably heavy-weight denims and sturdy shirts. They went back to the two stores that carried the single action weapons as part of their inventory but only came up with a couple of cases of .45 Colt ammo. Next stop was the armory at the Central Station, which quite unexpectedly they found abandoned. Sergeant had access to the Department's armory and they cleaned it out picking up all of the ammo, crowd control items, a few semi-auto M16's, .40 S&W pistols, 12-gauge shotguns, leather, soft body armor and lots of magazines for the rifles and pistols.

The final stop was a grocery wholesaler. The place had been picked over a little but wasn't completely barren. They added soaps of various types, staples, and any canned goods that were still in full cases. They also added almost a trailer full of jars and lids, more lids than jars fortunately. Spices and condiments were the final items to round out their selection. They had the 3 pickups and trailers full and they filled the other two pickups with a precious commodity, toilet paper, feminine supplies and Kleenex. They hit a tobacco shop for cigars, a few dozen cartons of cigarettes, pipe tobacco and all of the butane lighters. They got a liquor store for a couple of cases of booze and 10 cases of red and wine wines plus a few cases of beer and sodas. They should have bought another trailer but U-Haul was only a few blocks away so they got one more trailer. Next they hit a Blockbuster and picked up a wide assortment of VHS and DVD movies to expand their collection.

A drug store provided a bountiful supply of oral hygiene products and a properly placed pry bar opened the pharmacy. Steve had been making a list of medications he wanted to add to his stocks and pharmacy fulfilled most of that desire. They hit a Movies 8 on the way to the hospital and picked up 200# of popcorn and the cooking oil and even took the popper and the hotdog warmer in case they later built a common building. The hospital supplied more bandages and drugs that were on Steve's list but not in the pharmacy and included more sutures, disposable suture kits, hemostats, scissors, one of those carts with the blood pressure monitor, IVAC temperature device, oxygen saturation device etc. A stop at a respiratory supply company yielded bottles of oxygen, regulators, masks, tubing, a nebulizer etc. A second stop at U-Haul provided the 5th trailer and they loaded it up some special food plus ammo they found in the back room at Wal-

ly World and fishing gear. They were pretty well loaded down when they left the valley to go back up the hill.

The reason they didn't take all 5 trailers in the first place was that they hoped to find some small fuel tankers on wheels at one of the local construction companies but they came up empty. Loaded as they were, it was a slow drive up the mountain and they barely made it by dark. Steve had the lead vehicle so he called Selma on the sound powered phone and she sent Billy down to lower the drawbridge. Next time down the mountain, they figured maybe they could get a couple of those Honda Mountain Bikes for the boys and the girls if they wanted one. When it comes to teenage girls, fathers have a lot of trouble figuring what will trip their fancy on any particular day. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, it is just the way they seem to be from a father's perspective. Oops, I forgot to mention the meat. The grocery wholesaler carried a line of canned meats. The product line was called 'Real Canned Meats'. They also had canned butter and some items long absent from the table.

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Friday, August 4, 2006... Day 287 PT...

They kept those 2 extra trailers they picked up and parked them at cabins numbers 5 and 6. Jack's travel trailer and Kodiak 7'x14' enclosed cargo trailer, Moira's trailer and both pickups pretty much filled up their backyard and driveway. Jack called the travel trailer their 'guesthouse'. Steve and Sandy had 2 pickups and two trailers but their lot was a little larger. With everything completed, they went down the hill and picked up 6 used diesel pickups and 5 more U-Haul trailers. The trailers went to cabins 7 through 11 and the pickups to cabins numbers 5 through 10. They picked up more filters, oil and made sure each of the pickups had a new battery, spare belts, new tires and a toolbox.

Saturday, August 5, 2006... Day 288 PT...

It was down the mountain one more time to get 5 more used diesel pickups and 4 more U-Haul trailers. They did the same as before and brought those pickups up to good working order. When they got back and had the plunder distributed Steve asked that everyone over the age of 15 gather at his and Sandy's home. He had something he wanted to talk about with all of the adults.

"I'm not sure how to handle this," Steve said, "So I'm going to act for a moment as if everyone is new to this place. I have a few items of information and then we need to make some decisions.

"1. Sandy and I own this property free and clear. The last cabin is about 5' short of our property line.

"2. The place we encroached on to the west is privately owned and has been in the owner's family for 2 generations. The current owner is some enviro-wacko who won't even cut down the dead trees. Since we haven't seen him, I assume he's dead.

"3. I suggest we go back to the valley on the first of the week and empty out that grocery warehouse of anything that has long-term storage capabilities. Sandy checked and those canned meats have a shelf life of 7-8 years.

"4. I think we're going to need a storage building to store all of the food.

"5. With the setup we have here, we should be able to stay on indefinitely.

"6. Remember, I was a Special Forces medic and now a Paramedic. There is a limit to what I can accomplish, so everyone try to be careful. I'll run my clinic out of this room and if you need a hospital, we'll put you up in your own bed and I'll make house calls.

"7. We need to run this small enclave of humanity as a Democracy with each adult having one vote. Ok, folks, the floor is open for criticisms, comments, discussion and any votes we need to take."

"I, for one am tired of building for a while," Jack started off. "Randy, isn't there a place we could get a small prefabricated building that we could use for storage?"

"Jack, there's a steel building retailer in the area and since it's only storage, I don't see why we can't store the things on pallets and just have a dirt floor." Randy replied.

"Anyone opposed to that idea?" Steve asked. "Ok, that's what we'll do."

"Why don't we get one large building or two small buildings?" Sandy suggested. "There was talk of a community center when we got the stuff from the movie theatre."

"Make a note, Zelda," Steve chuckled. "We'll have to put in a floor if we erect a community center."

"We can get 3 ready-mix trucks and haul some unmixed concrete up from the valley," Randy suggested. "We'll have to wait until we get here to add the water, but we can make it work."

"The only thing that I didn't mention was the shelter," Steve said. "It would be very crowded down there once we have all of the cabins filled."

"It can be expanded," Randy offered, "But what say we do one thing at a time here? Anyway, it's time for Randy's Jr.'s nap so Belinda and I have to be going."

You didn't think that Belinda could stay pregnant forever did you? It doesn't work that way. Sooner or later Junior just naturally wants to come out and find out what all of the

noise is about. It was an uncomplicated delivery and Junior came out at 7 pounds even as near as they could tell. Each family had a Bible and they were going to record births and deaths in the old fashioned way, in the cover of the family Bible.

Randall John Jenkins, born July 4, 2006 AD, Day 256 PT, 7 pounds. It would be the first of several entries.

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Monday, August 7, 2006... Day 290 PT...

They unhooked the semi-tractor from the Chevron tanker and headed down the mountain and picked up the lowboy at the pillar place. They drove into San Bernardino and found the building dealer and loaded up one half of a building. Next, they stopped by a ready-mix plant and dry loaded 3 12-yard concrete trucks. Back at the cabin, Randy dozed off a place and they formed up the floor to the proper dimensions, added water to the dry mix and poured the first floor. They screed it off and called it a day. A change in plans, but so what?

Tuesday, August 8, 2006... Day 291 PT...

Randy graded a spot for the community building and they pulled the forms from the first slab and formed up the slab for that building. They unloaded the lowboy and stacked the components for the storage building next to the slab. The heater for the building was one of those heaters that hang up in one corner and they had jets to convert it to bottle gas, but only half of the building. It was still early in the day when they finished, so they skipped lunch and went back to the valley to pick up the other half of the building and 3 more dry loads of concrete and a motorized Float so they could smooth of the floor of the community center some.

Wednesday, August 9, 2006... Day 292 PT...

They poured the second slab early in the morning and Randy got to run the motorized float since he was the only one who knew how. They took the concrete trucks back to the ready-mix plant and dropped them off. Then it was back to San Bernardino to pick up the first half of the second building. When they got back, Randy was sitting in a lawn chair with his feet propped up drinking a beer. They unloaded the first half of the second building and joined him. Sergeant and Marty had iced tea and the others had one of their rare beers.

“How did you get the concrete red?” Marty asked.

“It’s a dye that you work in when you finish the concrete,” Randy explained. “Look ok to you fellas?”

“Why red?” Sergeant asked.

“It was the only color I had,” Randy chuckled. (It was actually a brick color.)

Thursday, August 10, 2006... Day 293 PT...

They were back down the hill getting the other half of the community building for starters. They also ripped off a jukebox from a bar that had been gutted and some tables and chairs from a restaurant supply along with some miscellaneous items. Finally, they picked up four Honda motorcycles for patrol duty. They came under fire on the way home, but either the persons responsible for the shooting were bad shots or just too far away. They decided that they weren't going back down the hill until the two buildings were finished.

Friday, August 11, 2006... Day 294 PT...

“These buildings will be a challenge,” Randy pointed out. “We don't have a crane so we're going to need to make do with the loader.”

“We have plenty of time Randy,” Jack responded. “I'm going to arm the boys and put one of them at the top of the road and the other keeping an eye on the back of the cabins. Whoever shot at us yesterday might just have seen where we turned off Lytle Creek Road.”

Billy and Marty weren't quite so enthusiastic on this particular day. That incident with the bad guys back on July 12th was still fresh in their minds. Nevertheless, they got the SBS vests, their ALICE gear and started to patrol. For the boys, it was a bit of a tradeoff. They were getting to ride the Hondas but had misgivings about shooting anyone. No one said they had to shoot anyone, they had the police handy talkies, and so they could call in any trouble.

Randy, Jack, Steve, Marty, Sergeant and Matt began to erect the storage building. They'd talked it over and decided that putting in more supplies was a higher priority than the community building. The panels were numbered and they had a ring binder that went with each building. It reminded them of putting together a jug saw puzzle. They had also decided that once they started to assemble the building, they'd continue working every day until it was finished. Only then would they stop to rest.

That drawbridge had creaked and groaned quite a bit when they'd brought the ready-mix trucks and loads of building components across, but it held. This had been the first real test of Randy's engineering abilities. The fire road itself was gouged out of the side of the mountain and on one side was a steep slope and the other more of the same. Jack didn't consider the drawbridge to be foolproof, but with the way it was constructed, it would slow anyone coming up the road down enough to allow them to respond. Nothing is really foolproof and it only takes some fool to get by your elaborate defense to prove the point.

Big John – Chapter 17 – One Down and One To Go

Friday, August 18, 2006... Day 301 PT...

It had taken a full week to erect the storage building, install the heater and convert it to propane. They took the rest of the week and the weekend off and had a picnic. Sandy and Beth baked bread and made up some hamburger and hot dog buns, or as close as they could come anyway. There were hamburgers and hot dogs from the freezer, potato and pasta salads, and watermelon from the garden.

“The way I see it,” Marty began, “Is that we should finish the second building and then go to the valley to pick up the supplies.”

“You know Marty, the longer we wait, the more it’s going to be picked over,” Sergeant suggested. “Either way, it doesn’t matter to me.”

“There was that empty semi-trailer sitting at the loading dock and that other semi-tractor trailer rig,” Matt mentioned. “If we were to drop off that lowboy and hook up to the empty trailer we could haul a lot of stuff. Maybe we could even get that other semi-tractor running.”

“I’m game for anything,” Jack pitched in. “It’s easy enough to take a few cans of stabilized fuel, drain the tanks on that tractor and replace the fuel. “We’ll probably have to find a new battery, too. Maybe a can of ether will help getting it started.”

“We’ll leave the trailers home and just take the pickups,” Steve suggested. Being we were fired at on the last trip home, we’re going to need outriders, for sure.”

“We should be sure to get more baby food,” Randy added. “It would be easier for Belinda if she had store bought food instead of doing everything in the blender.”

“It’s been about 300 days since the attack,” Jack pointed out. “Any canned goods we take will probably only have a shelf life of another year at best. We should concentrate on staples first and canned goods second, but if we have 2 trailers, we can fill the storage building or come close.”

“We ought to hit a CNG armory and see if they have any heavy weapons left,” Steve suggested. “A couple of those Ma Deuce’s would sure improve our security. What do you think, Jack, you’re in charge of security?”

“Might just as well,” Jack conceded. “Maybe after we get the community building finished off, we can erect some guard towers, or not. Whatever you fellas think.”

“That might not be a bad idea,” Marty agreed. “Of course if it were up to me, I’d put in a barbed wire fence to slow any attackers down.”

"I think that gives us a shopping list," Steve summarized. "We'll get 2 semi-trailer loads of food, stop by an armory and put up whatever we can find there. Then we can find a fencing place and get some steel posts and barbed wire."

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Monday, August 21, 2006... Day 304 PT...

It would be just the six of them going down the mountain. They'd passed it back and forth and decided that Sergeant was right; the early bird gets the worm. They loaded 10 5-gallon cans of diesel in the back of a pickup and headed down the mountain with a pickup in the lead and in trail. They picked up a pair of new batteries at a semi-tractor service center, dropped off the lowboy and headed to the grocery warehouse. Sergeant sort of had a way with engines so they left him to tinker with the dead tractor and they began to load the empty trailer. When they had the empty trailer filled, they started on the trailer attached to the dead semi. About the time they had that second trailer half loaded, Sergeant finally got the tractor to fire up.

They kept working against a self-imposed deadline. None of them wanted to stay in the valley any longer than it took to get what they wanted and get the hell out of Dodge. When the trailers were full, they headed to the CNG armory. There were 23 Hummers sitting there and a fair amount of ordnance. This prompted them to change their plans. They loaded what ordnance they could carry in the 2 pickups and headed up the hill. They didn't have any trouble on this trip. When they got home, they used the forklift to empty the 2 trailers into the storage building.

"Given the choice, would you guys rather have pickups or Hummers?" Steve asked.

"Hummers!" came the reply from all of the men.

"We can get some big cigars and pretend to be Arnold," Jack laughed.

"It's going to take two trips minimum down the hill to get 23 Hummer's" Sergeant said. "But, I wouldn't mind having a Hummer with a Ma Deuce mounted."

"Make mine a Mk-19," Marty added.

"We're going to need to change those towing hitches to the civilian ball setup," Jack pointed out. "Otherwise we can't pull our trailers."

"Big deal," Sergeant said. "We'll hit the Hummer dealer first and get the hitches and change them right there at the armory. But, we'd better plan on 3 trips. We can take Billy and Marty and that will make 8 of us. We only have 21 pickups here plus Randy's SUV. Randy you want to trade-in the SUV?"

"No way, Jose," Randy replied.

“Still, we can get all 23 Hummers and if we tow down the trailers, we can load them up and clean out that armory,” Sergeant continued. “Once we have that done, we can pick up the fence posts and barbed wire.”

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Tuesday, August 22, 2006... Day 305 PT...

They left the tractor-trailer rigs sitting and gutted personal items out of their personal pickups. Down the hill they went, stopped by the Hummer dealers, got all the hitches he had in stock and headed back to the armory. Sergeant and Marty switched the hitches while the others loaded the trailers. You can about imagine what they got: AT-4's, grenades, rifles, pistols, the remaining machine guns, and a whole lot of ammo. They took one Hummer with a Mk-19 and 2 with Ma Deuces and headed back up the hill. The second shed and part of the first shed had been moved to the new storage building so they used the second storage shed to store the ammo and explosive ordnance and put the equipment in the first shed. There wasn't any ordnance remaining at the armory, only vehicles and they had all had the hitches converted. It was supertime by the time they'd finished and they called it a day.

Wednesday, August 23, 2006... Day 306 PT...

On the first of the two trips, they took trailers and went straight to the Armory. They swapped the vehicles, and went to the fencing place where they cleaned the guy out of barbed wire, razor wire and posts. Not those short posts that end up being 4' high after they're installed, but the 8' posts that ended up being 6' high after they were installed. You know, chain link fence posts. They took one trailer of barbed wire, one trailer of razor wire and 6 trailers of posts.

On the second trip of the day, they took the remaining vehicles, with trailers, and swapped them out. Then, they went back to the fencing place and picked up the remaining barbed wire and razor wire. They didn't encounter any resistance on either trip; maybe it was these weapons mounted on the Hummers that frightened people away. The same people that had fired on them on Thursday, August 10th had observed them all three days.

Once back at the enclave, they set about putting in posts. The end posts and corner posts were set in Quikrete and the remainder driven into the reasonably soft ground. They got the 4 end posts and 2 corner posts in that same day as well as the fence posts for the eastern end.

Thursday, August 24, 2006... Day 307 PT...

Jack woke up with a creepy feeling on Thursday morning. It wasn't anything he could put his finger on, but the hair was standing up on the back of his neck. He figured that

trouble with a capital “T” was headed their way. They had put in the fence posts on the eastern side 10’ apart. However, in the interests of getting the fence completed, he suggested that they put them in 30’ apart and string the wire instead. While Randy mounted the fabric fence gate, the others and some of the wives rushed to put in the remaining posts. It took them the entire day even spacing the posts 30’ apart because they went from the eastern property edge where the eastern fence and corner post were all of the way to the western edge of the enviro-wacko’s property where the other corner post was. The end posts were at the gates and at the ravine. Try as they might, they couldn’t get any barbed wire up except for the eastern fence.

Putting several spools of barbed wire on a galvanized pipe welded firmly to the bucket of the loader, they could string the wire. And they pulled the wire as tight as they could using, a separate come along on each wire. It wasn’t a cattle fence, just something to slow someone down. They completed the eastern fence by the end of the day.

Friday, August 25, 2006... Day 308 PT...

That creepy feeling was replaced with a sense of dread and on this day, Jack urged them to work like there wouldn’t be any tomorrow. Who knows, maybe there wouldn’t be, even some of the others now had that same creepy feeling. They started with new rolls of wire on the northern side and ran the wire out until the spools were nearly empty. These were the commercial, 80-rod rolls holding 1,320 feet of wire. Long enough for half of the northern fence. They braced the unsupported fence pole, stretched the wire tight and several people began tying it to the posts. Lunchtime came and went and they just kept working. By early evening all of the northern wire was in place and they got the partial spools left over from the eastern fence and had the western fence done by late evening just as the sun was setting.

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Monday, August 28, 2006... Day 311 PT...

Despite the sense of dread that hadn’t gone away, they made it through the weekend without any trouble. When they checked the supply of razor wire carefully, they discovered that the coils were deceptive and that they didn’t really have enough to do any good. So they left it in storage and went back to the fence and began installing the missing posts. This took them all day Monday and all day Tuesday from sunrise to sunset. There was only the single Mk-19 mounted on the Hummer and they had 4 Ma Deuce M2 machine guns. They had 4 of the M240’s also. They hadn’t done as well as they thought they might at the Armory, but they had far more weapons than they could shoot at any given time.

Wednesday, August 30, 2006... Day 313 PT...

“If we build guard towers, it will just give the bad guys something to shoot at,” Sergeant said. “Jack I know that you suggested it, and Marty backed you, but I’m opposed. I’d ra-

ther we mount the Ma Deuces on the Hummers and have a mobile fighting force instead of fixed fortifications.”

“It was just a suggestion,” Jack responded. “Mobile works for me.”

“There’s someone at the drawbridge,” Sandy announced. “Billy just called it in.”

The routine was well established by this time. They stopped at the top of the fire road and gave the people at the drawbridge the once over and then proceed from there. Jack was the most imposing figure so he’d been permanently elected to screen any newcomers. Besides, he was in charge of security, wasn’t he? It was a man and a woman but no children. They couldn’t tell for sure from 60-70 yards away, but the woman seemed very frightened and her eyes kept darting to the man and then to the ground. On the way down the hill, Jack made a show of charging his M16A3/M203.

“Can I help you?” Jack asked.

“Me and the wife was wondering if we could get some food and water,” the man replied.

“Is that right ma’am?” Jack asked.

Her eyes darted to the man as if to get his blessing and then she nodded in the affirmative. You didn’t have to be a rocket scientist to know that the woman was frightened of the man. The darting glance and the bowed head spoke very loud indeed.

“Are you armed?” Jack asked.

“No,” the man replied.

The woman glanced at him with a look of anger and quickly lowered her eyes.

Jack pulled out the whistle and gave 2 blasts. Steve, Sergeant and Marty came down the hill leaving Randy, Matt and the two boys at the top. When the other 3 Deputies got there, they pulled down on the man and Jack lowered the drawbridge. Jack frisked the man and came up with a Browning High Power and 2 spare mags. He indicated that the woman should cross the bridge and she did.

“You stay here,” Jack told the man. “I want you on the ground spread eagled.”

The man complied as if he’d done this before. Jack crossed the bridge and Sergeant raised it.

“What’s going on here?” the man hollered from the ground.

“Just hang on a minute buddy, we’ll be right with you,” Jack replied.

“Are you ok ma’am?” Jack spoke softly. “The four of us are San Bernardino County Deputy Sheriff’s and our families are with us at the top of the hill.”

“He kidnapped me and raped me repeatedly,” the woman replied almost in a whisper.

“He’s not your husband?” Jack asked.

“He killed my husband,” she replied.

“You can stand up now,” Jack announced.

The man rose and turned around.

Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt, the 3 M1A’s spoke in unison. I warned you there was a new set of laws, didn’t I? My exact statement was, “And what good did most of the laws on the books do anyway in a post nuclear-holocaust situation? There was going to need to have to be a new set of laws written more applicable to the situation at hand.” The man had been judged by his peers, found guilty and executed by his judges; it couldn’t get simpler than that.

The woman was taken up to Steve and Sandy’s to stay for a while. Steve explained that he was a paramedic and asked her a few questions. She had already been pregnant by the time her husband was killed and she was kidnapped and raped. She figured she was only about 10 weeks along. Sandy found her some new clothes and showed her the shower. She got water heating for a pot of tea.

“Find out as much as you can about her Sandy,” Steve suggested. “I have Xanax and Benadryl. Have her get some rest and if she needs something I think the Benadryl would be safer since she’s pregnant.”

As Steve was leaving to join the other men, Moira and Selma were coming in the door.

“You want to go move that body?” Steve asked.

“What for?” Jack asked. “You’re the one who believes in advertising. Did you get her name?”

“Maureen,” Steve said. “She and her husband were expecting their first child. She’s only about 10 weeks along, barely enough to be certain.”

“What would you say, about 20?” Jack asked.

“Somewhere in there, I’d judge,” Steve replied.

“Someone’s at the gate again,” Sandy announced.

“Lock and load,” Jack chuckled.

From the top of the hill they could see 2 men, one woman and 2 small children just either side of 5, say 4 and 6. Jack walked down the hill and did the drill.

“Help you folks?” Jack asked.

“I hope so, the older man replied. “My name is Manuel Cervantes and this is my wife Maria, my brother Jose and our two children. We came up out of the valley looking for a new start. We saw the drawbridge and Jose says maybe there’d be people. We didn’t expect to find a greeting committee. What did he do?”

“Murder, kidnapping and rape,” Jack replied. “Mind putting the rifle on the ground? I am a San Bernardino County Deputy Sheriff and there are others of us covering this little get together.”

“Oh, sorry,” Manny said. He laid his rifle down and Jose followed suit. Then he came dragging out a single action revolver and laid it on the ground beside the rifle. Again, Jose followed suit. Manny held out his hand to Maria and she brought a Browning High Power out of her purse with 2 extra magazines. This went on the ground too.

“Thank you,” Jack said. “What did you do for a living before the war?”

“I was a diesel engine mechanic and Jose was a barber,” Manny replied.

“Hang on a minute please,” Jack directed. Out came the whistle and he gave out 3 blasts. Everyone at the top of the hill stood up and Jack lowered the drawbridge.

“You want to do something with that body?” Manny asked.

“Nah, he’s our advertising brochure,” Jack chuckled. “People seeing that body will think twice before they pick up the phone.”

“No chit man,” Manny agreed.

You know how they did it, right? Separated everyone and got the separate stories. The notes compared just fine. Jose was 21, by the way. The family was given cabin number 7 because cabin number 6 was reserved for the moment. Everything was explained and it was basically a modified version of Steve’s earlier speech. Jose could be the barber and help with security. Manny would be in charge of maintaining the vehicles.

Quick summary:

Cabin 0: Steve and Sandy, with temporary guest.

Cabin 1: Marty, Selma, Sissy and Marty.

Cabin 2: Sergeant, Beth, Sandra and Billy.

Cabin 3: Jack, Moira, Jennifer and Joey.
Cabin 4: Randy, Belinda and Randy.
Cabin 5: Matt, Emily, Sally, Geena and Matthew.
Cabin 6: Reserved for Maureen
Cabin 7: Manny, Maria, Jose, Manuel and Maria.

Eight more to go, and no, they weren't thinking about expanding the community. The garden was next to the last cabin, number 15, and the slab for the community building on the other side of that. If they were to build another 16 cabins, the garden would be too small in the first place and they would end up encroaching on land on the other side of the enviro-wacko's land. They maybe had room for 4 more cabins and 4 more cabins were within the capacity of that 72-row garden. On the other hand, some beef would be nice. But it didn't make a hell of a lot of sense putting in a pasture on the windward side of the property.

Manny had learned diesel mechanics in the Army working on Hummer's. That glove really fit. It took 6 days with the extra pairs of hands to erect the community building. Matt took some of the lumber they had and built a nice back bar and belly up bar. They moved in the popcorn popper, the hot dog machine, the jukebox and the tables and chairs. Everything was done in two weeks. However, something was missing and the 4 Deputies got one of the Hummers with a Ma Deuce, hooked on a trailer, and went back down the mountain. They went back to the gutted bar and got the beer coolers from under the bar and the large screen TV and DVD/VHS player. Then they hit 2 liquor stores for beers and sodas. They got darned lucky; the EMP hadn't ruined either the big screen TV or the DVD/VHS player. They half suspected that might be the case because the jukebox worked. Now all they had to do was figure out how to educate the children. And unfortunately, they had to move the body so they leaned it up against the hill and hung a sign on the guy that said: Murderer, Kidnapper, and Rapist.

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Thursday, September 14, 2006... Day 328 PT...

"This is what I call living," Marty said, "Set 'em up barkeep and give me a Sarsaparilla.

"Marty," Sergeant said, "We don't have a barkeep, it's self-serve and all we have is Coke, Pepsi, Seven-up and the kiddie flavors."

"I'll get a root beer then," Marty said. "Get you anything while I'm behind the bar?"

"My coffee is fine," Sergeant replied.

"Where did we get the infrared heater and the microwave?" Marty asked.

"At the gutted out bar," Sergeant explained. "Everything in there seemed to work just fine."

“First time I set foot in a bar since, well you know,” Marty said.

“By the way Marty, you got what you wanted,” Sergeant chuckled.

“What do you mean?” Marty asked.

“Sarsaparilla is an ingredient in some root beers,” Sergeant replied.

Maureen Samuels (married name) was now living in cabin number 6.

Steve had told them come the first of the week they'd be cutting firewood. He said they'd clear all of the deadfalls and the dead trees from the neighbor's land and then take down any dead trees on his. Sandy had given Maureen all of the standard issue weapons and patiently taken her to the range day after day until she was reasonably proficient with their use. It was anybody's guess what was going through Maureen's mind but she took quickly to that .40 S&W. The SBSD was going through a transition when TSHTF, converting over from the model 92FS to the Glock models 22 & 23. Detectives were being issued either the model 22 or the model 23, depending on their preference. They had an assortment of both. Maureen opted for the model 23 because she thought it fit her hand a trifle better.

“I'm sorry about your husband,” Jose told Maureen.

“Thank you, Jose,” Maureen replied. “You don't have a girlfriend or a wife?”

“Had a girlfriend,” Jose replied. “She was in Los Angeles, you know, when it happened.”

“I'm half Guatemalan,” Maureen said. “My mother married an Anglo. She was a refugee.”

“Do you speak Spanish or Amerindian?” Jose asked.

“Neither, Jose,” Maureen said. “My mother didn't want anything but English spoken in our home. She said the United States was her adopted home and we should speak the language of this country. I was born here anyway and so I never heard Amerindian. And I never picked up Spanish out of respect for my mother.”

“Protestant, Catholic or Mayan religion?” Jose asked.

“Catholic,” Maureen replied.

“I've got to get on guard duty, but I just wanted to tell you that what happened wasn't right and that guy got what was coming to him.” Jose said.

“He died too quick,” Maureen replied.

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Monday, September 18, 2006... Day 332 PT...

"We should have kept a couple of those pickups to haul wood," Steve said.

"We can go get a couple," Jack replied. "I sort of miss that pickup of mine. Let's get someone to drive us down and we'll pick up Moira's and mine."

"I miss mine too," Steve said. "Let's get Billy and Marty to drive the 4 of us down and we'll bring back all 4."

"Fine by me," Jack said, "But this place is going to start looking like a used car lot."

"I'll get the boys and a Hummer with a Ma Deuce," Steve said. "It will be cramped but it's only one way."

Jack got the other men started cutting down trees and said to just stack the cut wood because Steve and he were going to the valley to retrieve some of the pickups to haul the wood. The boys both wanted to man the machinegun so a compromise was reached. Billy manned it on the way down and Marty on the way back. They didn't have any trouble on the way down. Coming back was an entirely different story. Lytle Creek Road comes off the I-15 at the Sierra Avenue exit, which is straight north of Fontana. The easiest way to get home, in this case, was to take Highway 30 to North Riverside, which butted into Sierra Avenue just before the I-15.

At the intersection of North Riverside and North Live Oak Avenue, they came under heavy fire. They hadn't had any trouble going down this same way. But coming home, someone was waiting for them. The two lead pickups did a U-turn and headed back the way they came. The two following pickups stopped just slightly crossways and the drivers, Moira and Jack, got out and lay across the hoods with their M1A's. Steve and Sandy pulled in beside them and did the same. Billy charged ahead with the Hummer and Marty was firing short bursts for all he was worth. Whoever it was didn't appear to want to tangle with a .50 cal and the fire from the housing tract stopped as fast as it had begun. They didn't wait for those people to change their minds; the four of them got in their pickups and moved out in a hurry. The Hummer couldn't keep up with the pickups and a ways up Lytle Creek Road they slowed down and let Billy catch up. Maybe next time, they wouldn't be so lucky. And next time, they wouldn't be using North Riverside. When they got home, Steve and Jack hooked on to the trailers and headed over to where they were cutting wood.

"Have any trouble?" Sergeant asked.

"You might say that," Steve replied. "If you go to the valley, stay off of North Riverside. We took fire at that housing tract at North Live Oak Avenue."

“What’s the name of the Tract?” Sergeant asked.

“I don’t remember,” Steve said, “And I didn’t stop to look.”

“That’s in Rialto,” Marty said. “Darn, I can’t remember either.”

“The boys are bringing the other two pickups and trailers,” Jack said. “What say we get this wood loaded and make room for them?”

They all stopped what they were doing and loaded up the logs first. Steve and Jack could spit those and the boys could take the cut up limbs. It made a bit of a difference having 10 men working on the firewood process. It appeared that it would only take them about a week to clear the neighbor’s land of dead falls and dead trees, and only about 2 days more to take down the dead trees on Steve’s property.

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Saturday, September 23, 2006... Day 337 PT...

By mutual agreement Saturday was hair cut day. Also, by mutual agreement, everyone wore his hair short, as in a butch or an Ivy League with in this case was a butch with a part.

Big John – Chapter 18 – That Creepy Feeling

He stood six foot six and weighed two forty five, kind of broad at the shoulder and narrow at the hip. And everybody knew you didn't give any lip to Big John. Everyone who liked Country Music knew that. Not everyone likes Country Music. Some folks sort of prefer the Latin Beat.

*¡Hola Carolina! ¡Hola Ernesto!
Te presento la cucaracha
La cucaracha la cucaracha...*

*Hello Carolina! Hello Ernesto!
Let me introduce the cockroach
The cockroach the cockroach...*

See, nobody cared whether the song was about a cockroach or anything else, that wasn't the point. The point was that Jose had never heard 'Big Bad John'. And, in a kidding sort of way, one day he called Jack Big John. Jack let it pass figuring, rightly, that Jose didn't know the song or his particular dislike for being called Big John. And, I never did tell which button Marty pushed that made Jack turn deadly cold did I? He called Jack, Big Bad John. It could have ended all right there too, except Jose was visiting with Maureen from time to time and she was a Country Music fan and played the song for Jose. Now Jose found the song amusing because the description pretty much fit Jack.

"*Big John, Big John, Big Bad John, Big John,*" Jose was singing the chorus to the song.

"Jose, I'd wouldn't let Jack hear you singing that song," Marty warned.

"Why not Marty? I think it's a really good song," Jose laughed. "Besides, amigo, it's a perfect description of Jack. Big Bad John."

About then, Jack walked in the community build and caught the conversation. He walked over to Jose, grabbed him by the front of his shirt and lifted Jose to eye level.

"Marty gave you some good advice, amigo," Jack said.

You do know how to break someone of being sensitive, don't you? You all gang up on Big Bad John and don't let up until he shrugs it off. You might even sing a song about his lady if she'll go along.

*She kinda breezed into town from New Orleans,
And said, "Boys, I'm Big John's Cajun Queen,
Now I didn't come here to argue or waste anybody's time,
I just came to get my man from your dirty old mine,
'Cause he moves me!
Now where you give up's where old Queenie's gonna start,*

*'Cause I got a powerful love in my heart,
So just show me the hole way down in the ground,
And tell the whole wide world Big John's been found,
And he's livin'!*"

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Thursday, September 28, 2006... Day 342 PT...

Jack had come to the conclusion that he was either going to have to beat everyone to a pulp or act like it didn't bother him being called Big Bad John. The latter was easier so he started to grin and bear it. Then they started in with *Cajun Queen* and Moira was calling him Big John.

"There's someone at the drawbridge," Sandy announced. "Marty just called it in."

"Lock and load," Jack hollered. They headed to the top of the hill but there was no one at the drawbridge.

"Diversion," Jack and Steve yelled at the same moment.

"Back to the cabins," Jack urged.

"He was just there a minute ago," Marty stammered.

"Don't worry about it Marty, that was the whole idea, to lure us away from the enclave," replied.

It was only a couple of hundred yards to the gate and about the time they hit it, they heard gunfire coming from the north. They could accomplish more with the Hummers equipped with the Ma Deuces and the one Mk-19 so they paired off and manned the vehicles. The women were already out with their rifles firing from the fighting positions. Jack had Randy use the backhoe to dig them because he thought you couldn't be over prepared. That and that constant nagging that kept coming back to haunt him.

The Army started adding armor to its High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle, or "HMMWV," years before Operation Iraqi Freedom, but attacks from small arms, rocket-propelled grenades and "improvised explosive devices," or IEDs in military parlance, prompted the Army to place an urgent priority on shortening production schedules and beefing up protection for vehicles already in the field.

The land-mine hazards in Bosnia led the Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) to contract with O'gara-Hess & Eisenhardt, a component of the Armor Holdings Company's Mobile Security Division in Fairfield, Ohio, to produce armor for the "up-armored" M1114 HMMWV variant. The firm also developed armor for the M1116

and M1145 Air Force variants of the HMMWV, as well as armor kits for other vehicles and an armor kit that can be installed on the M998 A2 HMMWV.

The up-armored M1114 weighs about 2,000 pounds more than the standard HMMWV and includes 200-pound steel-plated doors, steel plating under the cab and several layers of bonded, ballistic-resistant glass to replace zip-up plastic windows. Results of survivability subtests conducted on the HMMWV showed the following survivability features: the ballistic grill deflected several fragments and protected the radiator; the position of the radiator in the vehicle presents less of a target to detonation from the front (but not from aerial bursts); and the windshield was not penetrated. The ballistic fiberglass in the body appeared to offer little protection, while the windshield offered better protection. Tires remain the most vulnerable part of the vehicle. The standard tires on the vehicle are a run-flat type having a magnesium inner liner. There is no spare tire on the vehicle. Flats have been driven up to 20 km before failure. Up-armor kits have been developed for the HMMWV to improve ballistic protection and resistance to mine blast.

The M1043, M1043A1, M1043A2, M1044, and M1044A1 armament carriers w/supplemental armor provide added ballistic protection for armament components, crew, and ammunition. The vehicles are equipped with supplemental armor and the weapon mount, located on the roof of the vehicle, is adaptable to mount either the M60 (replaced by M240), 7.62mm machine gun; M2 .50 caliber machine gun; or the MK 19 Grenade Launcher. The weapons platform can be traversed 360 degrees.

The difference between the M1043, M1043A1, and M1043A2 armament carriers w/supplemental armor and M1044 and M1044A1 armament carriers w/supplemental armor is that the M1043, and M1043A1, do not have winches and the M1044 and M1044A1 do. The M1044A2 models have new bumpers, which make the vehicles slightly longer. A 9,000 lb winch is also available for the M1044A2 models as an option.

Except for the fact that their M1044A2 had the conversion that allowed them to pull their trailers, the description from Global Security was right on the money. It was a real pity that those attackers hadn't done their homework better. It finally occurred to Jack, right in the middle of the worst firefight that he'd ever been in that Toto had been acting strangely and looking to the north and yapping. Not loudly, like he'd heard a noise for sure, but enough that Jack should have paid better attention. Over in Iraq, not even the up armored Hummers had been enough against some of those IED's. And, whoever these guys were, they had AT-4's so they must have cleaned out one of the other CNG Armories.

One of the lessons Iraqi Freedom taught was that the doors had insufficient protection. The work around developed was to place a second sheet of the window glass inside the door of the vehicle. While the troops couldn't open the windows, they doubled their protection factor and it was too hot to lower the windows anyway, forcing them to rely on air conditioning.

The Hummer with the Mk-19 was pumping out rounds in short bursts of maybe 5 rounds. The Ma Deuces were firing off short bursts as well. Unfortunately the attackers held the high ground for a change and were well camouflaged, making effective strikes against them difficult at best. Jack was driving a Hummer because if he manned a gun he'd be an irresistible target. They were swerving to avoid the occasional AT-4 coming their direction and up to the moment had been successful. Then the vehicle that Steve was driving, it had a Ma Deuce, took an AT-4 right in the engine compartment, followed a few long seconds later by a second Ma Deuce carrier taking a hit near a rear tire and flipping the vehicle. There was no way around the obvious conclusion that they were getting their butts kicked but good. Marty was trying to put a new belt in their Ma Deuce but all of the swerving Jack was forced to do to avoid the onslaught of AT-4's was throwing Marty off balance and he was cussing up a storm.

Then there was a pause followed by more gunfire but this gunfire wasn't aimed at them.

Someone had managed to get behind the attackers and was pouring what sounded like a mixture of spaced 7.62x51mm rounds and short bursts from M16A3's into the rear of the attackers. Then during a very brief lull in the fighting Jack thought he heard what sounded like an old fashioned Calvary bugle blowing the charge. This was going from strange to just plain bizarre. Jack told everyone on the radio to hold their fire because someone was behind the attacking force and he didn't want any Friendly Fire Casualties.

Whoever was up on the mountain behind the attackers seemed to be well armed. There were explosions he identified as either 40mm grenades or possibly M67 fragmentation grenades, he couldn't really be sure. Most of the fire was coming from M16A3's with the full-auto bursts and some from either Garand rifles or M1A's. After a few bursts it became evident that they weren't firing long bursts anyway. That meant either superior weapon control or, more likely, the A2. The fire slowly diminished and eventually stopped all together.

"Hold your fire, we're coming in," a voice called. Here come about 3-dozen guys and the front of the parade was led by two guys about 5'5, one fat and one maybe 160-165. The third man was taller, pushing 6' and was black. They had SA revolvers and M1A rifles. The black guy was wearing what appeared to be an old Calvary uniform, circa 1880. They had fast draw rigs, that 2-gun rig from Kirkpatrick Leather Company that Jack recognized as the Laredoan. The people following them were dispatching other attackers, usually with a headshot and collecting arms as they came. They stopped about 10 yards on the other side of the fence and just stood there.

"Who in charge of this group of misfits?" the short fella with the average build called out.

"I suppose that would be me," Jack replied climbing out of the Hummer.

"My name is Gary Olsen," the old man called out, "And they call my buddies and me The Three Amigos. But if you want, you can call me TOM, I've sort of gotten used to it."

“Gary Olsen, huh?” Jack said aloud. “Then you must be that crackpot from Palmdale that wrote that letter to Bush.”

“I’m not a crackpot,” Gary said, “Just a little senile. How’s about you folks tell us how to get in this place of yours and how’s about a cup of coffee?”

“Go to the east and follow the fence,” Jack directed. “We’ll send someone to open the gate.”

The other men in the party continued to collect arms and ammunition and anything else of value, adding it to a growing pile. That Olsen fella sort of set the pace for the others as he hobbled along the fence. They were let through the gate still carrying their fire-arms. Jack checked on everyone and Steve was ok but a little shaken. His gunner was Jose and he was fine. The vehicle that overturned completely had Sergeant driving and Billy as the gunner. Billy was ok except for a broken arm. Sergeant was still in the vehicle but unconscious. Steve pulled an ammonia inhalant out of his bag and gave Sergeant a good whiff, which brought him around.

Jack joined their guests and waddled along with them as they made their way to the community building. He offered the men and their companions a cold beer. The companions accepted but the short fat guy wanted coffee if they had it and some sweet and low. The black man asked for a diet Coke and Olsen for a Coke Classic. Olsen must have changed his mind about the coffee. But no, he took the Coke down in about 4 swallows and said he’d take some coffee when it was ready.

For about the three next hours, The Three Amigos told their story of turning their housing tract into a fortress. The Chinese warhead, apparently intended for plant 42, was a little off target and detonated north of the plant. Had it been off as much in the other direction, they wouldn’t be having this conversation. The gist of it was that they come through the affair intact but had been off the air for many months because, as the Green fella put it, old Gar-Bear had tripped over something, left un-described, and had managed to drag the radio to the floor, smashing it.

Recently they been attacked up in Palmdale and repelled the attack. They followed the attackers and they’d come here. End of story, well, almost. They were talking about someplace the 3 of them called the Underground City. They were headed back to Palmdale to load up and head out. Strange old birds; wearing single action revolvers, chain-smoking, crustier than a new loaf of french bread. They’d apparently taken everything in Palmdale and the area that wasn’t nailed down or too hot (radioactive) to handle. The geezers and their families said their goodbyes and were off in a cloud of dust. Was that a silver bullet Gar-Bear left? Impossible, the price of silver was probably way up there. Weren’t wearing any masks either, but when you’re that ugly you only wore a mask to keep from frightening people like the Phantom of the Opera.

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Friday, September 29, 2006... Day 343 PT...

They had two Hummer's beyond redemption, a boy with a broken arm, bullet holes in everything, and from Jack's point a view, egg on their face. Sergeant had learned that The Three Amigos were recovering alcoholics and was tempted for a moment to tell Marty, "See what you could grow up to be?" He passed, figuring it would drive Marty back to the bottle. And, they'd forgotten to ask whether Bush had answered the letter, not that it mattered anymore. The benefits of them having body armor were evident judging by the number of large bruises people were sporting. The weaknesses of their defenses were telling.

"We almost came up short on that deal," Jack observed.

"We're going to have to clear out the timber for about 500-yards on the up slope side," Sergeant said. "But we're going to have to seed it heavily so we don't get mud slides."

"Where would we stack that much firewood?" Steve asked.

"We could leave it as logs," Marty suggested, "And stack it on the other side of the fence as a barricade."

"That might work," Jack agreed. "Randy could drag them into place with the dozer."

"Plus there is enough room down on the other side of the community building to stack the firewood from the limbs," Steve pointed out.

"Does anybody know what they have at Ft. Irwin or Twentynine Palms in terms of armaments?" Jack asked.

"What did you have in mind, Jack?" Sergeant asked.

"Land mines and more rockets," Jack replied. "Plus more ammo for the Mk-19 and even another Mk-19 or two if we could find some. We need a free fire zone and we should convert that free fire zone into a no man's land."

"It won't keep some sharpshooter from shooting into the enclave," Randy said.

"So, we'll just start working our way up the hill," Jack suggested. "Start on one side and cut a swath all the way across. Then turn around and cut another swath going the opposite way. It will be like peeling an onion. I'll take Sergeant and we'll go to the military bases. Someone else go get that lowboy and swap out the Hummers."

"And don't forget to seed as you go," Sergeant added.

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Wednesday, October 4, 2006... Day 348 PT...

Jack and Sergeant were back. They'd taken a single pickup and trailer and came back with them loaded down plus a tractor-trailer rig filled to the gills. They'd actually ended up in Barstow at the Marine Corp Logistics Base. Their booty included: 3 Mk-19 40mm machineguns, 6 M-249 SAWs, cases of M14 APM (90/case), M16APM (4/case) and M18A1 antipersonnel mines (one/bandoleer, 6 bandoleers/case), more 40mm grenades for their M203's, M3 MAAWS, M72 LAWs, M136 AT-4s, more Interceptor body armor, AN/PVS-6 night vision and AN/PVS-10 day/night scopes. The entire 40' trailer was nothing but the mines and they were mostly the M-16s with several cases of M-18A1s and a dozen or so cases of the M14s. They had left on the previous Friday, a few hours after the attack. In their absence the Hummers had been replaced, and the timber had been dropped back about 200-yards. Randy had dragged the trimmed logs to the fence and they were stacked in a pyramid 3 layers deep and 3 layers high in some places. Bad plan or good?

The M-16 APM is a particularly nasty device called the Bouncing Betty. And they had a lot of them. It seemed that the government didn't dispose of the now unpopular landmines, they just stored them away. That was very thoughtful of the government wasn't it? Speaking of which, just where in hell was the government? Still hiding at Mt. Weather waiting for another attack? The military, it should be noted, had moved further west to the Los Angeles area and was trying to clean up that mess. The Inland Empire had been left to the care of local law enforcement but if that bunch that had shown up on July 12 was any gauge, they were up against more than they could handle.

If they got that timber cleared and those mines in and the grass seeded, nobody was going to advance on them from the north or west or east, their areas of greatest exposure. This still didn't solve the problem with them being called to the drawbridge. This required something a little subtler, but that was in the back of the pickup in the form of some closed circuit TV equipment that had been installed at Barstow. It had taken Sergeant and Jack a full day to dismantle the outside surveillance cameras and they had the cameras, several monitors and several spools of wire. The cameras had a zoom feature and they could mount one at the top of the hill and it could pan the entire area of the fire road. If there was someone at the drawbridge they could zoom in and determine who or what they faced.

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Saturday, October 21, 2006... Day 365 PT...

They stopped clearing timber to remember the anniversary of TEOCAWKI, the day when their world ended and they started down a whole new path with a new set of rules. Jack had found a use for the razor wire in the shed. Some of it went in the gully at the drawbridge and the rest of it was strung from the downhill side of the drawbridge to the top of the hill. Then, even if someone got adventurous, they'd play hell accessing the

road. He'd mounted the camera overlooking the fire road and there were monitors in Steve, Sergeant, Marty, his and Randy's homes. The 6 station sound powered phones now went from the drawbridge to the shelter, Steve, Sergeant, Marty and his homes.

In the 17 days since Sergeant and Jack had gotten back, the timber had been cleared to 500-yards, the logs moved and the branches all cut and stacked. They planned to stop for now at 500-yards so they could get the mines planted starting the first of the week. They'd worked 16-hour days, 7 days a week improving their security. One should remember that it took 2 80-rod rolls holding 1,320 feet of wire to wire the northern exposure meaning that exposure was about 2,640 feet across or ½ mile. When they started to plant those mines, they would be working a whole lot slower. They were going to start about 50-yards out from the fence and sow mines from there to about 400-yards up the hill. The M-18A1 Claymores would eventually go in near the fence. For the moment, they were only putting those on the east and western ends of the compound. And rather than risking having someone down by the fence to detonate the Claymores, they would all be detonated from central panels.

No one new had shown up at the drawbridge since the Cervantes family so they still had 8 empty cabins. Jose and Maureen were seeing more of each other and there seemed to be some affection apparent. It was too soon to say; she hadn't lost her husband all that long ago. Jack and Sergeant had brought back a flagpole and it had been installed but they hadn't figured out what flag they wanted to fly. They had a US flag, flags from the 50 states, historical flags including the Gadsden flag, a Southern Cross, and a Bonnie Blue flag. Some were leaning towards the Bonnie Blue, others towards the Southern Cross because they were in Southern California.

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Sunday, October 22, 2006... Year 2, Day 1 PT... Day 366 PT...

Jack was sitting watching the camera he had mounted to watch the valley. There were definite signs of life down below and the camera, while not able to give him a really close up view, allowed him or anyone at the compound to keep an eye on what was happening. There were now several thousand people if the amount of traffic was any clue. Lots of old vehicles and pickups. About what one would expect after the world ended. Not a lot of driving, however, there must still be a fuel shortage. Right after installing the camera and while making the first pass, he'd spotted a couple more tanker trucks and they'd gone after them. They added 16,000-gallons of gas and 16,000-gallons of diesel, all now properly stabilized. He'd also spotted a propane tanker and they brought it back. It was a big sucker with 9,200-gallons of propane according to the manifest. They were not going to run out of fuel any time soon.

It was nice having the bank of monitors to watch the place; it made security an easier chore. He strapped on his six guns and headed out to help plant mines. It was easy putting in the Claymores; all you did was stick them in the ground. The hard part came when you wired them into the panels. You had to be pretty careful that you got the right

wires. They were using telephone cable with 25 pairs to the cable. Heavy wire, 22 gauge, Jack guessed. They hit every Radio Shack and electronics supplier in the valley until they had enough switches to build 3 small panels and one large backup. There were so many Claymores that it took a row of switches for each sector and a map to tell which sector was which.

The M16's were easy enough to plant, dig a small hole, insert mine and pull the safety pin. They didn't bother on making a map; they just used those little wire flags to mark the mines until they were done. It was a completely random pattern and anyone, including them, who wandered into the kill zone, could easily trip a mine. Especially once that grass came up. It was the dark zone, forbidden territory and they didn't need to be there and neither did anyone else. Obviously they were not going to try and cut the grass. What would they do if they needed to move the mines? (Find out later)

There weren't very many people at the compound; only 8 of 16 cabins had people. Security was all about them not getting themselves killed. They'd had the skirmish or two or three, but they hadn't lost anyone and if Jack had anything to say about it, they never would. They rarely ventured off the mountain anymore and when they did, it was in a group. The upside on the Hummers was the added armor. And, the official policy was run don't fight. They put a sign up in 31 languages concerning that minefield. In English and Spanish it said 'Mines' or 'Minas'. In the other 29 languages it said 'Park'. Coming to America? Learn the language!

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Tuesday, November 7, 2006... Year 2, Day 17 PT... Day 382 PT...

"Jack, we have a bunch of people at the drawbridge," Sandy announced.

Jack swiveled the camera and zoomed in a little. It looked to be 4 families, he couldn't tell for sure. They looked harmless enough. Some of the men were carrying rifles or shotguns but were making no attempt to hide them. Jack picked up the phone and listened to Sandy visit with the man he could see on the monitor.

"We can see you on our monitors," Sandy said. "Who are you and what do you want?"

"It's getting bad in the valley," the man said. "I brought my family and 3 others and we came to the mountains looking for a new start."

"I've got it Sandy," Jack said. "This is Jack Douglas and I'm in charge of security. I can see you on my monitor, so why don't you point to each person and identify them for me?"

"I'm John Jacobs, and she is my wife Karen," the man said. "The two kids on her left are our kids Johnny and Julia. The two on her right are a couple of strays we picked up on the way. Their names are Jimmy and Ruth. That man there is Bob Ralston and the

woman is his wife Camille. Their kids' names are Robby, Glenda and Rose. The next man is Dick Larson and the woman is his wife Rosemary. Their kid's name is Tommy. The last man is Ronnie Smith and the woman is his wife Joann. Their kids' names are Karen, Joann and William."

"Thank you Mr. Jacobs," Jack said. "I need to know what each one of you did for a living."

"Ok," Jacobs replied, "You sure want to know a lot. I worked in a warehouse and my wife was a homemaker. Bob was a sound technician for Disney and his wife was a homemaker. Dick worked for AmeriGas and Rosemary worked for Albertson's. Ronnie was working as a firearms instructor at the Beverly Hills Gun Club and Karen was a secretary. I think I got that all right."

Jack could see the people nodding at John's last statement so apparently John had.

"Here's the deal," Jack said. "I need you to lay all of those firearms off to the side. You will be searched and if we find any firearms on your person the whole group will be turned away. Explain that to everyone and then let me know what they say."

John kept the mike open, but it was very hard to hear what he was saying. He handed his shotgun to his wife and she put it over at the side of the road. Everyone gave up his gun except for Ronnie, the gun instructor.

"Ronnie says the only way you'll get his gun is from his cold dead hands," John explained.

"Let me talk to him," Jack instructed.

"This is Ronnie and you can't have my firearm," Ronnie said.

"Ronnie, most of the people on this mountain are former Deputies with the SBSB," Jack explained. "You need to understand that we must protect ourselves. As soon as we're satisfied that you folks are ok, not only will your weapons be returned to you, but we may well provide you with additional weapons. In the meantime, that's how it's going to be. So you decide if you're going to be the one responsible for getting the entire party turned away."

Jack could see Ronnie remove the magazine, clear the action and place the M1A rifle gingerly on the pile.

"John, we'll be down in a minute, you folks just stand by," Jack instructed.

"Lock and load people, we have some newcomers at the drawbridge," Jack announced over the newly installed PA.

“Sandy, you keep an eye on them and if they do anything except wait, call us on the radio,” Jack advised.

“10-4.”

The 10 men went to the top of the hill and Bubba went down to lower the drawbridge. Jack frisked them and allowed them to cross the bridge after he had any extra magazines or knives. The only person who had a knife was Ronnie and he also had a LBE with 10 extra magazines for the M1A. When everyone was across, Jack blew three blasts on his whistle and Sergeant, Steve and Marty joined him. They collected the weapons and Jack raised the drawbridge. Jack noticed Ronnie watching his rifle and why not, it was a Super Match model with the top of the line SA scope and the Marine camo stock. Jack carried only his M16A3/M203 and Ronnie’s rifle and the others brought the rest of the guns.

“Whatever you do, don’t step off the road,” Jack cautioned. “The area all around here is heavily mined.”

“What are you people a bunch of nuts?” John asked.

“Not at all, but we’ve been attacked and have taken tremendous precautions to see that it never happens again,” Jack replied. “If it hadn’t been for the 10th Calvary riding to our rescue we’d all be toast.”

“Say what?” Ronnie said. “The 10th Calvary was disbanded in 1898.”

“They’ve been reformed in Palmdale,” Jack laughed. “Anyway I want all of you to listen up, here’s how this is going to go down. We will put all of you in our community center for the moment. After that, we will interview each family separately. We will decide on a family-by-family basis whether or not to offer you residency in our enclave. We will explain how it works here and you can decide whether to stay or leave on a family-by-family basis.”

All of the interviews went well and the intra-family stories checked, as did the stories concerning what happened after they began getting together. Jimmy and Ruth were just what John had called them, strays. Two kids looking for a handout they’d picked up along the way. Steve and Sandy offered to let Jimmy and Ruth live with them. Everyone was invited and when they’d heard Steve’s little speech about what was expected of them as members of the community, decided to stay.

The cabins had been renumbered to reflect the wire numbers on the sound powered phone system:

Cabin 01: Barranca, Steve and Sandy, Jimmy and Ruth.

Cabin 02: Wilson, Marty, Selma, Sissy and Marty.

Cabin 03: Rowland, Sergeant, Beth, Sandra and Billy.

Cabin 04: Douglas, Jack, Moira, Jennifer and Joey.
Cabin 05: Jenkins, Randy, Belinda and Randy.
Cabin 06: Johnson, Matt, Emily, Sally, Geena and Matthew.
Cabin 07: Samuels, Maureen
Cabin 08: Cervantes, Manny, Maria, Jose, Manuel and Maria.
Cabin 09: Jacobs, John, Karen, Johnny and Julia.
Cabin 10: Ralston, Bob, Camille, Robby, Glenda and Rose.
Cabin 11: Larson, Dick, Rosemary and Tommy.
Cabin 12: Smith, Ronnie, Joann, Karen, Joann and William.

Twelve down and four go.

Security situation: Excellent. Minefields fully installed and operational. Three Guard Towers, West, Central and East, equipped with Mk-19 40mm machineguns and M249 SAWs. Minefields controlled by sectional Guard Tower with Master Control in the Shelter.

Fuel situation: Too much to count. 100 cords of firewood stored.

In addition, there was a pail of grenades (M-67) in each Guard Tower in case someone turned mountain goat and tried to scale the ravine wall to the compound. It hadn't taken much practice to determine how long to hold the grenade before dropping it. Anything over 3 seconds put the person within reach of a rifle anyway. A person didn't really have to worry about bullet drop when he or she was shooting straight down. The only question was would their luck hold? And, as far as that flag went? They said screw it and hung the Gadsden flag and below it the Southern Cross. Age before beauty.

The last cabin was at Steve's property line and next to that the ½ acre garden; beyond that was the community building and beyond that the stacks of wood. Kind of makes you wonder what they would/could do if the next party of people to show up had 5 or 6 families doesn't it? Those Guard Towers that Randy had fabricated out of the left over galvanized pipe and ¾" plate were located between the front of the houses and the ravine. Very close to the ravine. A person could look over the edge of the tower and see anyone climbing up that wall of loose rock. And the towers were high enough to see over the houses and right up to that barbed wire fence where the logs were stacked and the Claymores were deployed. It wasn't going to get cold in the Towers either. They had sliding windows fashioned from bulletproof 'glass' borrowed from a couple of bank branches.

Big John – Chapter 19 – Population Explosion

Be careful what you wish for, God has a sense of humor and you just might get it. That might go for worrying about what could happen, too. You worry that you only have 4 cabins to fill and that 6 families might show up and God just might give you that, too. If that happened, you probably have to take those 100 cords of wood and distribute them among the cabins and move that garden to the other side of the community building. Except your garden was only 103 feet wide and that was about 1½ cabins wide. That's because your lots were 65' wide and deep. Those cabins were about 5' in from the western edge of the lots and they were 43' wide, giving a 16' 'RV' access to the backyard. The difference between the 1,040' used by the cabins and the width of Steve's property was $1,320 - 1,040 = 280$ and that's where you had all of the storage buildings, the sheds and the tankers.

So, you either put the cabins on the other side of the community building and leave the garden where it was; or you moved the garden and wasted some space. Top that consideration off with the subject of meat. That meat from the grocery wholesaler might just last 8 years on the shelf, but that only assumed that you had a huge supply in the first place. And, 4 freezers among 8 families with those freezers including some frozen vegetables meant that meat might be getting a little low after 1 year.

They used 36 yards of concrete putting in the 4" slab for each steel building. $9 \times 27 = 8,748$ and the buildings were 60'x144' or 8,640 square feet. And the storage building was 5' from the eastern fence, which meant that those tankers were packed in pretty tight. Bad idea, but what could they do, they only had so much space. That 280 feet was eaten up by the building-65' and the two sheds-20' only leaving that 195 feet wide space for those tankers, etc.

Of the 1,320 feet on the other lot, the garden took up 103 feet, the community building another 65 feet, leaving them room to build of 1,152 feet. There was room for another 16 cabins where the wood was stored, huh? And even a little bit left over. Now, when it came to the meat, they could put a chicken coop between each of those Guard Towers. Plus there was room for a second shelter down at the west end and another in the center if they ran it east to west rather than north to south. I'll bet you knew what Randy was doing, right? He was on his second roll of shelf paper trying to figure expansion plans and just where to put everything. Jack's valley view camera was on the top of the center Guard Tower in case you wanted to know. That was the tower with 2 cameras, one pointed north and one pointed south. The other 2 had a single camera each.

And don't forget, they talked about putting that wood line back another 500 yards so that they didn't have a problem with snipers or whatever. It took a good man to consistently hit a man-sized target at 1,000 yards. Decisions, decisions! The practice seemed to be food first, shelter second and clothing third. Don't forget, the shelter slept 10 and Jack had a 'guest house' in his back yard. They ended up with a list of priorities:

1. Find chickens to raise and beef and pork to butcher. Plus, hold your nose, 2 milk cows and a bull plus 2 sows and a boar.
2. Locate material for 16 additional cabins including everything.
3. Go shopping for more clothes, preferably jeans, heavy work shirts and more children's' clothes.
4. Build 16 additional cabins.
5. Move the timberline back to 1,000-yards.

The next question was what did they have to buy or trade for the livestock? 48 Eagles and several rolls of silver coins; plus a fair amount of surplus arms and ammunition collected from those people who had attacked. While Sergeant and Jack had been checking out military bases, they gathered up that pile of weapons from the other side of the fence, buried the bodies after stripping them of anything useable and had a fair assortment of extra firearms and ammo. Had to be careful trading off the guns and ammo, it might just end up being used against you.

"We can't get any more pillars," Randy said, "But 3 truckloads of concrete would pour a slab and we could use the leftover yard from each pour to put in some sidewalks. A yard will make about 30' of sidewalk using 2x4 for forms."

"It's not that we are so short of people anymore," Jack said. "Some of us could get to the San Joaquin valley and get the livestock and others could start collecting building materials. Once we had everything we needed, we could start erecting more cabins."

"I'd better stay here to keep an eye on Maureen," Steve suggested.

"Do you think we could rig up stalls or something in our open trailers?" Jack asked.

"I can do that," Matt replied.

"Ok, put 2 stalls wide and 2 stalls deep in two of the open trailers, Matt," Jack suggested. "Steve, I'm going to get Moira's and my Eagles and silver, can I have yours and Sandy's?"

"No problemo, partner," Steve said. (See what happens when you get a Hummer?)

"Randy can you supervise distributing the firewood and grade for 16 more cabins?" Jack asked.

"Easy enough to do that," Randy replied.

"It's a shame those are only 16 station phone sets," Jack observed.

“That’s only because of the switching set up Jack,” Bob said. “Give me a little time and I can get all 32 phones plus the gate and shelter phones on a single circuit if I have the right switches.”

“Randy did you figure out where to build the extra shelters?” Jack asked.

“Got you covered there, Jack,” Randy replied.

“Well, there’s no time like tomorrow to get this show on the road,” Jack said. “How about Sergeant, Marty and Manny come with me to go up north and Steve figures out how to handle everything on this end?”

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Monday, November 13, 2006... Year 2, Day 23 PT... Day 388 PT...

Among them, Jack, Moira, Steve and Sandy had 48 Eagles and 4 rolls of silver coins in 3 denominations: dimes, quarters and half dollars. Each of them had 12 Eagles and Steve and Sandy had one roll of each sized coin while Jack and Moira had 3 rolls of each sized coin. Add to that about 50 firearms, magazines and a fair amount of ammunition, courtesy of The Three Amigos. Jack pulled 2 Browning Hi-Power 13 round magazines to go with the handgun they had taken from the guy doing the advertising by the drawbridge. The body didn’t stink anymore, thank goodness. He set off, with Sergeant, Marty and Manny to the San Joaquin valley in 4 trucks each pulling an open trailer.

They were not taking an escort so if they ran into trouble they would be on their own. Each man had a semi-auto handgun, a police shotgun, an M16A3/M203, and M1A rifle and a pig sticker. Plus, they had 1 case of the MRE’s from Jack’s 5 cases in each pickup. Their tanks and auxiliary tanks were full and each man carried 8 5-gallon cans of diesel. Everyone was wearing the SAA’s with his semi-auto as backup. They even had cowboy hats, a popular headgear among California farmers. They didn’t have any of the other popular gear, the John Deere cap. Manny was the only one wearing cowboy boots.

They went to up I-15 to route 58 and over through Tehachapi to Bakersfield where they continued on 58 past I-5 to Buttonwillow. From there, they started going from farm to farm looking for livestock. They found a rancher with some chickens and they stopped to visit. They learned that livestock, on the hoof, was going for \$1.50 a pound for yearling heifers, \$2.00 a pound for milk cows producing milk, yearling bulls and market weight steers and \$2.50 a pound for mature bulls. Hogs were going for \$1.50 a pound for sows, \$2.25 a pound for market weight hogs and \$2.50 a pound for boars. Chickens, when you could find them, were \$10.00 each. Unless you could pay in gold, in which case, your gold was valued at \$500 per ounce; the price of gold the day the balloon went up and the livestock prices were cut in half.

That farmer had chickens with clipped wings and they bought 100 paying with a single Maple Leaf. The farmer suggested that they head up towards Fresno and look around the area. He'd heard that they could get beef and hogs up there. He had chicken feed he could sell for \$10.00 per bag and they bought 50 bags, using a second Maple Leaf. They back tracked to Oil City and headed north on state route 99. They spent the night in an abandoned motel in Pixley. From there, they started visiting farms again. By the end of the day, they had 2 milk cows, a mature bull, a yearling bull, 3 yearling heifers and 3 market weight steers. The farmer provided a bale of hay per animal and sold them additional bales at \$20 per small square bale and they took 250. The livestock came to 16 Eagles and the hay 1. And, they were out of room.

"I think we'd be better off to drive straight though with these animals," Jack suggested.

"Did you fellas want hogs?" the farmer inquired.

"We did but we're out of room," Jack explained.

"Mort has hogs and a truck that runs, but no fuel," the farmer said.

"Think he'd deliver them if we could provide him with some diesel fuel?" Jack asked.

"Well his truck is gas, but you can trade diesel for gas even up, in Visalia," the farmer explained.

"Stabilized gas?" Jack asked.

"Must be, I run it in my truck," he replied.

They filled their tanks and had 6 empty cans. They figured that wasn't enough so they would trade off 20 gallons of diesel for 20 of gas in Visalia. They dug out their California road map and the farmer showed them where they were and how to get there. He also told them if they could spare 5 gallons of diesel, he'd go set things up with Mort. They transferred 5 gallons of diesel to the farmer's empty can, got directions to Mort's from Visalia and took off to trade the fuel. Eventually, they found their way to Mort's.

"You boys get lost?" the farmer asked.

"I've been lost since I left LA," Jack laughed.

"Ok, I talked to Mort and he can sell you a mature boar, a yearling boar, 2 sows and 6 market weight hogs. He'll deliver them for 100 gallons of gas plus what he uses making the delivery."

"You Mort?" Jack asked the other man.

"That's me," he replied.

“Okay, Mort, here’s the deal,” Jack said. You’ll need a couple of 55-gallon drums to bring with you. We have a few hundred gallons of fuel back where we live. We have 50 gallons of gas here so that should get you to LA. We’d like to leave tonight and drive straight through, is that ok?”

“I reckon,” Mort replied. “That mature boar is around 500 pounds and the yearling about 250. That would be 750 pounds at \$2.50 a pound. Those 2 sows are about 600 pounds each so that’s 1,200 pounds at \$2.00 a pound. The feeder hogs are 250 pounds each and that’s 1,000 pounds at \$2.25. I can add a wagonload of hog feed and let you have the whole thing for 14 Eagles.”

Jack did some math on the calculator and the animals came to 13.05 Eagles and he figured the wagon might hold about 3 tons of feed.

“You have a deal, load them up, fuel the truck and let’s get down to LA,” Jack said.

“Say you boys know where I might could get me a gun?” Mort asked.

“Might, what did you have in mind?” Jack asked.

“One of them AK-47’s with some magazines and ammo,” Mort replied.

“It’s your lucky day Mort, I can fix you up for 2 feeder hogs,” Jack said. “An Ak-47 and 7 40-round magazines and 1,000 rounds of ammo.” (\$1,125)

“Say, you wouldn’t happen to have two of those would you?” the first farmer asked.

“\$1,125 for the same package, Jack said.

“Two Eagles and 5 of those old silver dollars do?” the farmer asked.

“Close enough,” Jack said. “If we can keep the chicken cages.”

They arrived back at the compound around dawn on Wednesday, November 15, 2006... Year 2, Day 25 PT... Day 390 PT... They filled both of the drums full and poured the remainder of the gas in the farmer’s fuel tank and topped off his tank. You’d have thought that he’d robbed a bank or hit a jackpot in Vegas.

Summary:

100 chickens including 15 roosters,
2 milk cows plus
1 mature bull,
1 yearling bull,
5 yearling heifers,

3 market weight steers,
1 mature boar,
1 yearling boar,
2 mature sows,
4 market weight hogs,
50 bags of chicken feed,
250 bales of hay and
3 tons of hog feed.

Cost: $1+16+14-2=29$ Eagles (less 5 old silver dollars) and 160 gallons of gas plus whatever fuel they burned. Not bad, all things considered. In their absence, Steve had gotten some regular fence posts and had one area for the cattle, a second for the hogs and had built 2 very large chicken coops. They kept the chicken cages anyway. They had 3 beef and 4 hogs to butcher and would butcher 50 hens, probably the 50 largest. They were going to need butcher tools plus a smokehouse and some hickory to cure the bacon and hams. Maybe they paid too much and maybe they got a deal, who was to say? The main thing was they could now produce their own milk, cheese, and meat. And, as far as the garden went, they could close up the rows a little.

Sergeant was the only one who knew anything about butchering and only because he'd been a meat cutter for a while. He told them that they needed a grinder, electric meat saw, hand meat saw, some boning and butcher knives plus a sharpener and a steel. There were several abandoned grocery stores in the valley with bare shelves but the meat cutting equipment intact. They gave that a high priority. It was cool enough that they could butcher the livestock and let it hang in the first shed to age a few days. Sergeant recommended 7 and said if that weren't good enough, next time they'd try 10. There was now enough room in the storage building to set up the meat cutting operation. Jack suggested they try a Costco store for paper and tape if they couldn't find enough at the grocery store.

If you bust your butt, you can cut up a side of beef or a whole hog a day into commercial cuts including making the hamburger/sausage, providing you have someone to wrap it. So, they killed the hogs and one steer first and got the butchering equipment while they were hanging (1-2 days for the hogs). They got all of the paper and tape they needed at the grocery store and the following day Sergeant began to cut and wrap the hogs. They also killed one additional steer every other day. It being late in the year and the shed unheated, the butchering conditions were ideal from a sanitation viewpoint.

Meanwhile, everyone else was hauling in building materials until they had enough of everything. And a few extra building materials to make shelters for the animals against the snow that was up in the sky just waiting to bust loose. The animal shelters were hastily constructed but having a carpenter in the community made a difference. Portable hog house heaters were set up to keep the buildings warm. They moved one chicken coop and erected a hen house and put the 50 birds in the house and butchered 50 hens.

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Thursday, November 23, 2006... Year 2, Day 33 PT... Day 398 PT... Thanksgiving...

Sandy had thawed out the last two turkeys. The hams should be done smoking in time for Christmas. To tell the truth, nobody knew and they couldn't go out on the Internet and look it up. Items were prepared in individual homes and everything taken to the community building and shared. Nice little get together and Jose escorted Maureen to and from, carrying the things she prepared.

"I was looking at this list," Randy said. "We got the livestock, and all of the building materials and things for the cabins. Since tomorrow is the day after Thanksgiving how about we go shopping for clothes and Christmas presents?"

Randy, by the way, had 'forgotten' to return the trencher and backhoe with the loader. And in this new age, possession really was 9 points of the law. They had greenbacks, gold and silver and sticky fingers if the goods were abandoned.

National Public Radio was on the air and the President was safe, as if anyone cared. He told the nation in a radio address that 'your government' was doing all that it could and the FEMA camps were operating in several locations. Several provisions of the law had been invoked and that there was a continuing curfew and travel restrictions. Didn't really sound like the man had much of an idea what had gone on during the last 398 days. Law Enforcement officers and the military were exempt from the curfew and travel restrictions, naturally. Sandy could create any kind of document on her laptop and there were those badges they'd recovered... Looked to them like there were going to be some new Deputies.

They also talked about the 16 cabins and decided to do the slabs but wait until after February to start on the cabins themselves. This was a little different than building cabins on pillars because they had to get the underground plumbing in first. Randy and some of the boys would start doing that the first of the week and the others would keep moving the timberline back. Clearing the rest of the timber was going to be a pain because with the massive mine field in, they'd have to cut up the logs and branches and haul them to the compound.

There was still some room, they figured, 16 times 65' was 1,040' and they had 1,152', leaving them over 100' to stack firewood. This wasn't somewhere you wanted to live if you didn't like closed in spaces. On the other hand, all of that firewood being stacked on the west end would sort of give them a protective layer. And, it was a whole lot safer protective area than all of that propane, gasoline and diesel. Maybe they should erect a wall or something so no one could shoot into those tankers and trucks. Well, add it to the list of things to do. Moving the timberline back would make that harder to do, anyway.

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Friday, November 24, 2006... Year 2, Day 34 PT... Day 399 PT...

Jack, Moira, Steve and Sandy would go with the people from cabins 5-8 to the valley on Friday. Sergeant, Beth, Marty and Selma would accompany the people from cabins 9-12 down below on Saturday. Clothes were at the top of the list, especially for the children. They crammed into 2 pickups and took 2 Ma Deuce equipped Hummers as escorts. All of the men had badges and ID's in those leather badge holders stuck in a pocket. They had no trouble getting to the valley and were in a Sears store when...

"Jack! Steve! I thought you guys were dead," Penrod exclaimed.

"Us? We're too mean to die," Steve laughed.

"You holed up at that cabin of yours?" Penrod asked.

"We have a total of 12 families now, Sheriff," Jack replied. "Including Sergeant and Marty."

"Had a lot of trouble?" Penrod asked.

"Less than expected, but more than enough," Jack replied.

"Must be pretty cramped having 12 families in one cabin," the Sheriff observed.

"We have 16 cabins now and are planning on building 16 more," Steve announced.

"Really? Don't expect you're coming back to the Department in that case," Penrod said.

"What Department, Sheriff?" Steve asked. "We were by the Central Station a while back and it was deserted."

"Was it you guys who got into the armory?" Penrod asked.

"Yes, Sheriff, we picked up a few things," Jack admitted.

"Well good, I was afraid someone got the stuff who shouldn't have it," the Sheriff replied.

"If you're not running the Department out of the Central Station, then what's going on?" Steve asked.

"The rules have changed, Steve," Penrod said. "Violent crime gets you killed and petty crimes are generally ignored by the Department. People are left to resolve the issue on their own. It seems to be working out ok."

"Sounds a lot like the system we use," Jack smiled.

“What Deputies we have, work out of their homes,” Penrod explained.

“Sheriff, I don’t suppose you could make it to the cabin on say Sunday, could you?” Steve inquired.

“What do you need?” the Sheriff asked.

“We have some people we’d like you to swear in as Deputies,” Jack replied guessing where Steve was going with the invitation.

“I can’t make it, but I can delegate the authority,” Penrod said. “There isn’t really anyone around to tell me I can’t, now is there?”

“How is Arnold these days?” Steve asked.

“Don’t know and don’t care,” Penrod said. “He probably went back to Austria if he could find a ride.”

“Did you hear Bush’s announcement?” Jack asked.

“Yes I did,” Penrod said. “Now in addition to fighting violent criminals we’re going to be fighting FEMA and maybe the Army. You guys want to take charge of the mountain regions for me?”

“What’s the drill?” Steve asked.

“If you kill them, you have to bury them,” the Sheriff said. “You can’t keep hanging signs on their necks saying, ‘Murderer, Kidnapper and Rapist’. I saw the drawbridge but didn’t check further because I didn’t know who was behind it and it sort of fits with our new way of doing things.”

“Once we get those new cabins built, we’re going to need more people,” Steve pointed out.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Penrod said. “I’ll see you later. I have to go steal some more Christmas presents.”

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Monday, November 27, 2006... Year 2, Day 37 PT... Day 402 PT...

It seems that there were 2 mindsets in the country. That of the politicians who still thought they were running everything and that of the locals that had become far more pragmatic, almost primitive. When had the west ever been this wild? It hadn’t, except perhaps in a few mining camps where justice was dispensed by a miner’s jury. It was

certainly different than anything in history. But, this was Post TEOCAWKI, wasn't it? And, people had 230 years to figure out what they liked about the old system and what they didn't. Justice was either a stern warning or a bullet. This could have set the stage for tyranny, but it didn't because the lessons of the last half of the 20th Century were fresh in everyone's minds. At least, at the local level, they were.

What about the rest of the world and all of the opportunistic nations out there? They were dealing with the intercontinental fallout for one thing and had gotten into some infighting over who would divide the spoils and how they would be divided. Some really nasty infighting, if you were there to observe it first-hand. With the American Fleet out to sea when TSHTF, America still had the most powerful Navy in the world even if it didn't have much of a country left. As far as the federal government was concerned, the military still got the highest priority because the military was the only thing that stood between the United States and people who wished to reap the spoils of the day the world ended. Translation: the government took whatever it needed to keep the military going and paid for it in greenbacks. Kind of like before TEOCAWKI, huh?

Randy used the trencher to put in all of the trenches for the utilities. After careful consideration, he decided that the septic system was already large enough. Some of the men began putting in forms and then the plumbing once they knew where everything went. The other men were up on the mountain harvesting timber. It took 6 days to put in the forms, the plumbing and utilities. The boys were assigned to feed the cattle, hogs and chickens and told to leave the eggs lay so they could increase the flock. They took Sunday off and had a communal potluck at the community building. Everyone was tired and there wasn't a lot of talk.

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Monday, December 4, 2006... Year 2, Day 44 PT... Day 409 PT...

Randy and 6 others went down the hill and brought back 6 trucks dry loaded with concrete. They added water, poured 2 slabs and about 65' of sidewalk. Randy sent the trucks down for second loads and they screed the concrete and Randy got the motorized Float running, smoothing the cabin floors. The sidewalks had to settle for just being screed. When the trucks returned, they poured 2 more slabs and another 65' of sidewalk. The construction crew all pitched in and they got all four slabs finished by dark. The timber crew had brought several pickup and trailer loads of wood off the mountain and it was split and stacked by supper time.

The theme was repeated Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and by sundown on Thursday, all 16 slabs were in. Friday morning they returned the ready-mix trucks and only brought back enough trucks to finish the sidewalk. By Friday evening the timber gang had widened the open area all the way across by about 100-yards. The timber simply wasn't that dense. They were getting a pretty good-sized pile of firewood, too.

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Saturday, December 9, 2006... Year 2, Day 49 PT... Day 414 PT...

“How are we going to handle this patrol thing, Jack?” Steve asked.

“I guess we’re going to have to make one circuit a day, Steve, does that sound reasonable to you?” Jack asked. “Back in the wild west days, the federal marshals rode a circuit that took them quite a while to complete. I figure if we make one circuit a day that will be enough.”

“Sounds good to me,” Sergeant offered. “How are we going to divide the duties?”

“How about one of the four of us and one of the new Deputies?” Jack suggested. “Pick a partner and I’ll take whoever is left. We’ll use a Hummer with a Ma Deuce mounted and carry extra fuel and a little food. We can do a straight rotation and a team will only be on patrol every 5th day.”

“What’s our territory?” Marty asked.

“Penrod said the mountains,” Steve explained, “So I’d say we just do the San Bernardino National Forest and the towns in that area. The rules we applied to that guy who brought Maureen to us are the rules that will apply, with one exception. We have to bury the bodies.”

“I’ll take Manny,” Sergeant said.

“I’ll take Jose,” Marty added.

“I’ll take John,” Steve said.

“That leaves Bob, Dick and Ronnie,” Jack said. “Do you think that Ronnie could handle a team of his own?”

“I’ll tell you what Jack,” Sergeant said. “Let me take the first patrol and I’ll take Ronnie with me and check him out. If he’s okay, he can lead the 5th Team and pick either Bob or Dick to ride with him. This first time only, you can take Manny with you.”

Ronnie was an NRA certified firearms instructor and a former military policeman. If any among the newcomers had a shot at knowing enough about law enforcement and helping people they figured it would be Ronnie. Ronnie was quiet, reserved and very level headed. His only quirk was that he was a devoted supporter of the 2nd Amendment and expressed views that the 2nd was more important than any of the others. Interesting, was the Constitution actually even relevant on day 414 PT? Some said yes, some said no and the others didn’t care. But then again, what did you expect? It really was a whole different world now. In the days before, people worried about being prepared and getting things back to normal as soon as possible. What was so great about what passed

for normal in the days before? Drive by shootings? People trying to commit suicide by parking their Jeep Cherokee's on the train tracks and then chickening out and killing at least 11 people? Special circumstances my butt. That guy would have probably gotten off because he was 'crazy'. He needed a little courthouse justice, like taking him out behind the courthouse and putting a bullet in his brain. He wanted to die anyway, so why not oblige him? But no, it was going to be another show trial costing millions. And then, the Chinese solved the problem.

Big John – Chapter 20 – Anybody Need a Hug?

There are people in the world who suggest that you should turn the other cheek. That's so the guy can shoot you a second time, I guess. Jack was all in favor of shooting back, to hell with the cheek thing. And as one could well imagine, Christian or not, he wasn't really in to hugging boys over the age of 12. He kind of worried about all of those huggers. Wasn't sure if he could count on them in a pinch. He didn't know if they'd shoot back or give the attacker a hug. Then again, when you're Big Bad John, you have an image to protect. And, it didn't really surprise him that the Sheriff was a looter the same as they were. The Sheriff was supposed to let his family starve to death because there wasn't anyone to run the store and the ATM's didn't work?

I'm not taking this sitting down. Not for one by God minute. I'll fly to Pearl and lay it on the line. We all know how much of a sissy Admiral Broderick was in the movie, right? He took credit where credit wasn't due and ended up with egg on his face. He was hugging those Japs to death. The point being that none of us can say how we're going to react when it comes right down to it. We can hope; we can dream; we can plan; we can even pray; but what will we really do? Probably do the best that we can to survive. Does the word pragmatic mean anything to anyone? It will when he shoots at you and you pull up your sissy 9mm that was made in Germany out of plastic and kill the guy. Or, are you going to pray for him first and let him get the range and put one between your eyes? Pray for him when you plant him, it works for me. We have to bury the bodies now, remember?

Lord,

We're burying this man whose name is unknown. He shot at me and I shot back. Don't be hard on him Lord; he might have come from a dysfunctional family or liberal parents. If anyone is to blame, Lord, it's the Department of Children and Family Services who won't let us spank our children. He didn't understand that a man does what a man has to do for his family but that doesn't include murder, kidnapping and rape. You said and eye for an eye and right now that's all we've got. I know you took it back and said that vengeance was Yours, but where were You when he was shooting? Thanks for the bulletproof vest. Amen.

[Should have called this story 'A Pessimist's View: The Cold Hard Facts'.]

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Monday, December 11, 2006... Year 2, Day 51 PT... Day 416 PT...

Sergeant and Ronnie went on patrol for the first time. They took Lytle Creek Road north to Lone Pine Canyon Road and turned east. That took them to 138, which they followed on down to Crestline. From there, they could drive in a big loop, passing through most of the communities and ending right back at 138. From there, they could reverse course and go back to the cabin. Lots of people had moved to the mountains and most of them

were thriving. It seems that they had their own system of justice and it looked remarkably like what the Sheriff and they had discovered. There weren't any jails any more or any prisons to send people to. So you either worked something out, exiled them or killed them. Exile was for people who wouldn't play by the new rules that society had forged but hadn't done anything bad in and of itself. They just sat back on their butts and expected the community to care for them. The communities cared for them in the only way they knew how, they threw them out with just enough supplies so they could learn to fish or cut bait.

Even good Christian folks got tired, after a while, of breaking their backs so someone else could sit on their backsides. Didn't it say somewhere in the Good Book that, "God helps them that helps themselves?" (Actually, it doesn't. It's quote of Poor Richard, Ben Franklin.) Seems like society and the politicians forgot that. Well, some of them anyway. What was the motive of the liberals and Democrats in insisting that everyone had a right to everything else that others had worked so hard to get? Were they just being good Christians? Or, were they just buying the votes of the people who could learn to live on welfare? A man could argue both sides of that issue, so don't let's go there. However the date today was: Year 2, Day 51 PT... and we had a whole new set of rules:

Rule 1. You work hard and just come up short, we'll help you; if you don't, be on your way.

Rule 2. Stealing is taking without the intention of paying in some way, if it is possible.

Rule 3. If your behavior is beyond redemption we'll send you to talk to the Great Redeemer, in person.

Pretty simple set of rules. None of those 'thou shall' and 'thou shall not' things; just good old common sense. All falling within the scope of the Ten Commandments, if you think about it. Say, did Moses use a rock or a chisel to write down those 10 basic rules? Unnecessarily complicated, but maybe that's what they needed at the time. Those rules were sort of the antithesis of what's mine is mine and what's yours is mine if I can get it. Property, life, wife, whatever. Also had to tell them to treat God like God and respect their parents. Those people must have been pretty childlike if they had to be told the obvious.

Sergeant and Ronnie didn't have anything unusual happen on their first patrol. In Sergeant's view, Ronnie handled himself admirably (that's what he said) when dealing one-on-one with people who had problems. So there were no bullets flying and it was pretty sedate out there. People were solving their own problems. It was obvious that they needed to send Steve out separately to provide some medical assistance. That was on the short side and he was, after all, a healer.

This necessitated a change in plans. They had some radios and charger stands they could spare from the Central Station and they left one with each community. The communities could call for Law Enforcement if they had a problem that they couldn't handle

or for medical assistance in that instance. Call it semi-organized society or chaos, whichever works for you. It would be up to the people of the communities to keep the batteries in the radios charged, but Sergeant told them where to find the means to do so. And, Sergeant and Ronnie were keeping an eye out for possible candidates to move to the enclave, but they didn't find anyone who needed to make a move that they were willing to invite. Now there was a double-edged sword. The people who needed to make the move were the exiles.

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Tuesday, December 12, 2006... Year 2, Day 52 PT... Day 417 PT...

It was decided that Ronnie would have the patrol on Fridays and they wouldn't patrol on weekends because Sergeant and Ronnie left the radios. Steve suggested that he offer first aid classes and he would still do a regular patrol and be on call on the other days. They worked it out that Sergeant had Monday, Marty had Tuesday, Steve had Wednesday, Jack had Thursday and Ronnie had Friday. So, on this day Marty and Jose were out. Ronnie said that Bob and Dick were free to choose him or Jack, so Bob went with Jack and Dick with Ronnie. Meanwhile back at the compound, they started to frame and close in the first cabin of the second 16 and the others continued to cut down trees. There wasn't the urgency they felt the first time so they (Matt) decided to finish the cabins one by one and then start the next. It would take, in Matt's opinion, two weeks per cabin with the first one being completed on December 23rd.

Thank goodness someone found an article about curing bacon and hams at a library. It seems the trick was to brine the meat and then to cold smoke it for a considerable time. Cold smoking used a temperature under 100° and took quite a while. Brining required the use of plain salt at the rate of a cup per gallon of water and soaking the meat under refrigeration for 2 hours a pound. Another trick used by chefs was to add 1 tablespoon of saltpeter per gallon of liquid. Saltpeter was available at pharmacies and would preserve the color of meat, especially beef and pork that would turn gray during the brining. If the color was important to you, add the saltpeter. It would be ham for Easter instead of Christmas. Hey who knows, maybe that's how that tradition got started? Maybe Christmas was the time to dig out some of the T-Bones. They weren't raising turkeys because the chicken farmer said turkeys were hard to grow. Maybe they could find a turkey farmer one of these days and lay in a few.

"I wonder what ever happened to those people up north?" Steve said.

"What people do you mean?" Jack asked.

"You know, Jack," Steve explained, "The people up in the Petrolia area that were all but wiped out by that tsunami."

"I hadn't thought about that in a while," Jack admitted. "First we had those dirty bombs and then the darned big earthquake. Well, Steve I guess the Chinese wiping out the US

made it come out right because that was the third event. Yeah, I wonder how those people made out? I know they had that shut down reactor but I can't believe the Chinese would have wasted a missile on that. But I guess you never know about what people are thinking."

"Or, not thinking," Steve said. "It was sheer madness and folly to attack the US. What did they think they would gain a new contract with Wal-Mart?"

"Which reminds me, I wonder whatever happened to that professional killer who was killing all of those people?" Jack mentioned. "He just dropped out of sight after that Corporate Executive and his bodyguard got killed."

"We have more to worry about than some professional killer," Steve said. "Like getting enough medicines and things for the people in our area."

"I guess since you think you're Dr. Albert Schweitzer or Dr. David Livingstone, we'll have to hit every pharmacy and hospital in the Inland Empire," Jack suggested.

"Man, I just hope I never find myself in a situation requiring surgery," Steve replied. "A Special Forces medic is pretty well trained, but there's a limit."

"If you can help them, you help them and if you can't, it's not your fault," Jack pointed out. "Sometimes I wonder what kind of God would let something like these things happen. And then I realize that it was God behind the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah."

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"Maybe not Bermuda, but somewhere where it's warm," the quiet man observed. "Like Hawaii. That would be perfect. With that confrontation brewing in the Indian Ocean, nobody in his right mind would go to Hawaii."

The problem with all great plans is that events sometimes overtake them. Like the HSD switching the Threat Level to Orange and the military going to DEFCON 3 while he was in the air from the east coast to Los Angeles. He had some things with him that would work at Yellow but never at Orange. When he got to Los Angeles, he made a sudden change in his plans and went to ground waiting for everything to cool off a little. That never happened and by the time the quiet man was ready to resume his trip on the afternoon flight on October 21, 2005, it suddenly went from bad to worse. He was just about to step in a cab when the alert came. He held up 5 \$100 bills and told the cabbie to head east as fast as that bucket of bolts would go. They managed somehow to be at the front of the wave of traffic and the cabbie blew the engine on the cab near Ontario. The quiet man had just enough time to take cover before the warheads hit LA. As soon as he was sure in his mind that there would be no more warheads, he broke out the window of a pickup, bypassed the steering column lock and fired up the diesel. He was in luck, the pickup had a full tank of fuel and he got on I-10 and headed further east. He made it to Chiraco Summit and the Patton Museum before he stopped for fuel. No one

was around at the Chevron station so he filled the tank and headed for Desert Center a few miles further east.

Early in 1942, the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff concluded that in order to prepare the American troops for fighting in the desert of North Africa, the Army would need an area for specially training and equipping troops for this type of combat. Also, the American armored fighting unit was in its infancy and new equipment was being added to this new type of service.

General HQ assigned General George S. Patton, Jr. as the commanding general of the 1st Armored Corps and asked him to locate a place in the desert southwest that would be suitable for the location of a training site. General Patton flew over the area of California and Arizona and finally decided on a site that could be supported by water supply and rail access. He made arrangements with the Metropolitan Water District to supply water for the site and set up advance parties that would prepare the facilities. The training for the 1st Armored Corps began on 20th April, 1942 and ended 6 weeks later.

N33 44.9 W115 19.4 Remarks: The single runway is a paved section on top of one of General Patton's old runways. The windsock is located at the intersection of runway 05 and the taxiway. There are remains of Patton's army all around the airport including foundations from the old buildings and pieces of discarded equipment mixed in with the remains of old agriculture and vandalism. Beware of off-road vehicles on runway and taxiway.

Elevation: 559 ft
Runway: 05 – 23 Length: 4200 ft
Pattern altitude: 1559 ft (1000 AGL)
CTAF: 122.9 (multicom)
Services: No Fuel or Services

Desert Center had almost nothing including population. Except, perhaps, there was his old friend. He found the house and he found his old friend. He asked his friend for the package he was holding for him and when he got it, he gave his old friend \$1,000, just as he had promised years before.

Pfutt, Pfutt.

He wasn't really THAT good of a friend. In fact, in this business you never really had any friends, simply a string of acquaintances. He put the money back in his pocket and got the heavy case and the keys to his old friend's truck. He headed north from there and stopped at a place he knew in the desert about halfway between Desert Center and state route 62. As most of you know, state route 62 runs east from Twentynine Palms. He was just east of the Joshua Tree National Park in an area he was sure that was visited infrequently. This was his refuge, a place where no one would ever look for him. He made his way to the carefully concealed shelter where he spent the next 9 months.

On August 1, 2006, the quiet man finally left his sanctuary and headed to Barstow. At the Marine Corp Supply Depot he collected a few 'essentials' like M21 rifles, magazines, ammo, other minor ordinance and some MRE's. From there, he made his way to Yucca Valley and then up state route 247 to Lucerne Valley where he turned south on 18 and made his way to Big Bear City where he owned a home under an assumed name. There he remained until one day he spotted something that gave him cause for concern. The date was Thursday, December 14, 2006.

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Thursday, December 14, 2006... Year 2, Day 54 PT... Day 419 PT...

On the far eastern end of their territory or AOR, was Big Bear Lake and beyond that Big Bear City. Jack and Bob drove the extra miles to check up on the people in the area. They left 25-watt base station radios and antennas at Running Springs, Big Bear Lake and Big Bear City, the three communities not previously contacted by the others earlier in the week. At 6'6" and 245 or so, Jack was a hard man to miss. They wore the badges by sticking the ID case in their left shirt pocket and letting the badge hang. The idea was to remain less of an authority figure and more of a helping hand. They left the base stations rather than Handy Talkies because of the range back to the cabin. During their patrol, neither man saw anything to raise suspicion. Remember, Jack had been observed but was working only from the description they had for Mr. Joe Average: WMA, about 6' tall with an average build; brown and brown, left-handed with a Midwestern accent. He'd never seen the man.

How many millions of people did that fit before the balloon went up and how many fit it now? And, a Midwestern accent is really not an accent. Midwestern accent also applies perfectly to a large share of the population of California. Substantial proportions of the population of California before and after were people who originated in the Midwest anyway. Long Beach had an Iowa picnic for years. The town was once referred to as "Iowa by the sea". The Iowa picnic was replaced by some gay pride affair. There was a lot of hugging going on at THAT event. All gone now. As far as hugging goes, recovering alcoholics tend to hug each other a lot too.

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Monday, December 18, 2006... Year 2, Day 58 PT... Day 423 PT...

The quiet man had surreptitiously followed Jack and Bob back to the cabin. Always observant and especially careful, he noted the drawbridge on the fire road and spotted the small closed circuit TV camera using his binoculars. He was extremely careful and certain he hadn't been spotted. Where there is one camera, he figured, there must be more. He drove back up Lytle Creek Road a ways and parked. Then he took his M21 and started cross-country and came at the camp from the north. The sound of chainsaws stopped him, but the sparse timber allowed him to see the open area surrounding the compound. Then, he saw Steve and Sergeant and rightly assumed that at least

several of the members of the group were Deputy Sheriff's. He further assumed that at best, they only had a general description and returned to his pickup and Big Bear City.

"Jack, it's probably nothing, Moira said, "But I was panning the camera down at the drawbridge, and I'd swear that I caught a glimpse of an old pickup following you and Bob. It was the far north edge of the camera's pan, so I could only see the front of the vehicle. What was that all about?"

"What did it do, honey, just stop?" Jack asked.

"Yes and I couldn't see if anyone get out," she replied.

"It's probably nothing, but I'll tell everyone to keep their heads up," Jack said and went to play with the kids.

The thinning timber made the clearing go a lot faster and they were now as much as 800-yards from the compound and it appeared that they'd be all the way to 1,000-yards by the first of the year. It was slowing the men down because they were cutting the logs to length, but there were a lot less logs to cut. They still had hundreds of the Bouncing Betty's and were going to put the M14's on the outer perimeter. The M14 was concussive and disabled but didn't necessarily kill. They would serve as a warning that those signs were true to any would be attacker who spoke English or Spanish.

Cabin number 17 was coming along fine and it looked to be completed by the 22nd. Bob had bypassed the switches on the phones and the phone system was capable of handling up to 36 lines. That would connect the 32 cabins, 3 shelters and the gate. And, of all the priority items remaining to be completed, putting the two additional shelters was at the bottom of the list. One other item of note, Jose had talked to Maureen and suggested that while it might be too soon after her losing her husband, he would stand by her and perhaps someday they could get married, if she would have him. He said that 4 months wasn't very long, and he understood. Maureen had been about 10 weeks along when she'd shown up on August 30th and it was past the middle of December so she was showing pretty good. When they went shopping back on the day after Thanksgiving, she'd shopped for maternity wear.

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Friday, December 22, 2006... Year 2, Day 62 PT... Day 427 PT...

"One down and 15 to go," Matt said as they finished the final electrical connections from the inverters to the electrical panel.

"It's going to take a while at this rate," Steve observed.

"Two weeks a cabin, Steve," Matt said. "However, you fellas are almost finished with timber so it will go faster with a double crew."

“Don’t look for us to start helping just yet,” Steve said. “We still have mines to plant from the 400-yard mark to the 900-yard mark.”

“When do you think we’ll be going full bore?” Matt asked.

“Give us a couple of weeks to plant the mines,” Steve said. “I’d guess about the time you have number 18 done.”

“Fine,” Matt responded. “After that, we should average a cabin a week so I’m guessing we’ll be done by the last week of January or the first week of February.”

You had to give them credit. They didn’t let a little thing like making plans keep them from doing what they decided to do at the moment. For instance, they hadn’t even planned on starting on the cabins until February and according to Matt they’d be done by then. No more cabins would be built because the grass had grown up and nobody was going into no man’s land. If they really had to, they could locate the mines by burning off the grass. But that could be risky because it could either set off the mines or start a forest fire.

“What are we going to do if we get a fire?” Jack asked the assembly.

“We don’t have a fire truck or a hydrant system Jack, so let it burn, I suppose,” Steve replied.

“What would it take to remedy that situation?” Jack asked.

“We can get a fire truck easy enough, we’d only need a pumper,” Sergeant said. “We might be able to build a garage for it between the center guard tower and the one on the east. But Jack, those things take a lot of water and all we have is the one well on a demand system. That tank of Steve’s only holds 1,000-gallons of water.”

“Maybe we need a water tower of some sort,” Jose suggested.

“Randy, what do you think?” Jack asked.

“There’s plenty of pipe and hydrants at that building material supplier’s,” Randy said. “What the water situation Steve, can we put in a second well?”

“I don’t think so Randy,” Steve replied. “As it was, they had to go pretty deep to get this water we have now. It shouldn’t be a problem though; it’s a 12” well. I always thought my father was nuts when he put that big well in, but I guess he knew what he was doing after all. That 12” pipe has a maximum flow rate of 4,700gpm with the water moving 13.4f/s and a head pressure of 4’/100’.”

“There’s room to put in a large water tank at the west end,” Randy said. “We’d have to pump the water from the well and probably use a high capacity pump to pressurize the system. I can’t see us putting in anything other than a tank. Those water towers call for some engineering skills I don’t have.”

“We might want to put the timber crew on the water system, Jack,” Matt suggested. “After they have those mines planted. It doesn’t really make a difference when we get all of the new cabins finished.”

“Do we have enough extra building materials to erect a firehouse?” Jack asked.

“We do. We went a little overboard when we got materials for the cattle shed, hog house and chicken coop,” Matt replied.

“Why don’t you build a garage for a fire truck before you start the next cabin then?” Jack suggested. “I’ll get a crew around on Tuesday and go find a pumper and some extra hose.”

“And I’ll bring back two loads of dry mixed concrete for a slab,” Randy offered.

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Monday, December 25, 2006... Year 2, Day 65 PT... Day 430 PT...

They didn’t have salads to go with the T-Bones because no one had figured out how to preserve lettuce for that long of a time. I suppose because there really isn’t a good way to preserve fresh lettuce. No big deal, they had plenty of those canned mushrooms and baking potatoes from the garden. They did the Christmas Day get together at the community building and some of them braved the cold to cook the steaks on the gas grill. They exchanged the gifts and had a good time watching old movies on the large screen TV and visiting. Nobody wanted to hear anything the government had to say so they left the radio off. It would probably just be Bush wishing everyone Merry Christmas and explaining why the emergency was forcing him to take away more of their rights. Didn’t mean much to them because they had their own set of rules and so did everyone else. Strangely uniform those rules, but I mentioned those before, I believe.

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“I know that we’ve only been seeing each other for about six months,” he said. “Just since I’ve moved back to Big Bear City. But times are different now and a woman shouldn’t be alone. Would you consent to be my wife?”

“Has it only been six months?” she replied. “Yes, I’ll marry you, but what do we do about things like a blood test and marriage license and all of that stuff?”

"Times are different now," he replied. "All we need to do is exchange vows between ourselves and say we're man and wife. That's what the others have done."

"Well then ok," she replied, "That's what we'll do. "I'll move in right away."

"Actually," he said, "I've been thinking about moving. I've heard that those Deputy Sheriffs' who come around have a community of sorts up in the mountain above Rancho Cucamonga off of Lytle Creek Road. Some of the folks say that they're looking for new residents and have several empty completely furnished cabins. I was talking to the man down the block and we were both thinking of moving. I worked out a trade with another fellow to give him my old pickup and some cash in exchange for his Mercedes-Benz M-Class 4-wheel drive sport utility vehicle. Then my buddy and I would both have one."

"What about this house?" she asked.

"It would get a little cramped for us and your kids," he said. "It's only two bedrooms and I hear those cabins are 3 bedroom units. We'll load your personal possessions into a trailer and add what little bit I have. I've always traveled light and only have a few possessions and my clothing."

"The kids could have their own bedrooms if it was a 3 bedroom cabin," she smiled. "I guess it will be a new adventure. Ok, let's do it."

"I'll tell my friend and his wife," he said. "They'll be very happy that you want to move."

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Those steaks weren't half bad," Jack said. "I'd have rather had turkey, though. Maybe we'll drive up to Fresno when the weather gets nice his spring and go see that hog farmer or the cattle farmer and see if they know someone who grows turkeys. What were their names again?"

"The hog farmer's name was Mort and the cattle farmer's name was Jack, the same as yours," Sergeant replied. "I'm surprised you didn't remember."

"Must be getting senile," Jack laughed. "Or maybe just forgetful."

"Long way to go for a bunch of turkeys," Sergeant said. "But I kind of miss having turkey myself. Besides, we could pick up some additional freezers in the valley when we go get the fire truck. We could probably get a half dozen on a trailer and a pair on a pickup. Maybe we should just get a freezer for every cabin."

"That would mean getting 30 freezers, Sergeant," Jack said. "And 30 freezers means that we'd need to buy more market weight hogs and beef because it will be a while before we have beef to butcher."

"We only need beef, Jack," Sergeant differed, "We'll have hogs to butcher in six months. We bred those cows and heifers so we'll have calves in about 9 months. That beef was pretty expensive, do you have much gold left?"

"Between Steve and, I we have 23 Eagles, and all of the silver plus those silver dollars," Jack replied.

"It's up to you of course," Sergeant continued. "But we'll have beef soon enough. You might just buy a couple of those steers and a bunch of turkeys to butcher."

"Well, 2 steers would be about 5 Eagles and I can try to barter off guns to pay for the turkeys," Jack agreed. $(1,250\# \times 2 = 2,500 \div \$500 = 5 \text{ coins at } \$500 \text{ each})$

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Tuesday, December 26, 2006... Year 2, Day 66 PT... Day 431 PT...

Sergeant got a break this week because Christmas was on his usual patrol day. Sergeant, Jack, Bob, Dick, Ronnie and Randy headed to the valley in 3 pickups pulling trailers. They had to hit Sears and several other stores before they came up with 30 freezers but the fire engine was easy. Randy and Ronnie picked up 2 ready-mix trucks, dry loaded them and headed up the mountain. Sergeant tackled driving the fire truck and they headed home. They distributed the freezers to the existing cabins except Jack and Steve's and put the remainder in storage. Randy graded the space for the fire station slab and Matt and a couple others formed it up. The dry concrete was mixed with water and the slab poured and floated before dark.

They still had to get the pipes and hydrants and they still had to build a water tank. The pipes would all fit in a trailer and enough hydrants in a pickup. When it came to a water tank, they came up short. Randy suggested that they just get some of those water tankers you see at construction sites on stilts and put them in instead. The following day, they headed back down below and got 10 of the tankers and all of the pipe and hydrants.

Big John – Chapter 21 – Running out of Cabins

The week after Christmas was consumed putting in the fire station, really just a garage for the pumper, and putting in the mines. The garage for the truck went in quickly so all of the men pitched in to help with finishing the other unpleasant bit of business. This just left them with 15 cabins to construct and the fire hydrant/water system to connect. The water main that ran the full length of the cabins had just been capped so it wasn't hard to dig down and put in a trench to extend it. Randy ran a trench to where the 10 water tankers were packed close together and they plumbed the tanks together and connected the water main. They left the old tank connected to the well, but disconnected it from the main and only left the pipe to the shelter. Randy dug a new trench next to the sidewalk and installed a hydrant between cabins 2 and 3 and every 4 cabins after that meaning that the second hydrant was between cabins 6 and 7.

The 10 Mega Corp. portable water towers also called stand tanks each held 12,000-gallons and had a 10" discharge pipe. So, they ran a 10" pipe to feed the hydrants and necked them down to 6" at the hydrant. A massive pump, capable of maintaining the system at 2,000gpm and 75psi was installed. The recommend pressure was met, but the volume was right on the edge. The recommend minimum volume was 1,000gpm for 2 hours. At 120,000-gallons they had 2 hours to douse a fire plus whatever the well could pump in those 2 hours. Which lead them to change the well pump to the largest capacity 12" well pump they could find. The only problem then would come if they pulled water out of the aquifer too fast. But, it met recommendations and it beat the crap out of what they had before, which was nothing. Maybe that's why Randy got 10 12,000-gallon stand tanks.

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Tuesday, January 2, 2007... Year 2, Day 73 PT... Day 438 PT...

They started cabins number 18 and 19 on the day after New Year's. They had them framed in a day and partially closed.

"Jack, we have 6 families at the gate," Sandy radioed. "Look like a bunch of Yuppies pulling trailers."

"Lock and load," Jack called out.

While everyone rushed to get their weapons he scanned the people on the closed circuit system. He saw 6 reasonably well dressed families, all with children. None of them looked malnourished or had dirty clothes. The vehicles were 6 Mercedes-Benz SUV's. And, here they were with only 5 finished cabins! Jack picked up the phone and talked to the gate. All 6 families were from Big Bear City and they were looking to move in. Jack did the Bubba bit and collected the firearms from the 6 men who all had firearms. They each had an M21 rifle, 2 M9 pistols and a suppressed .22 Ruger Mark II. The interviews went well and all 6 families were invited to join the community. One family stayed in

Jack's trailer until both crews were able to finish cabin #18 on Saturday. The men were just a bunch of average guys, 6' tall, brown and brown and one of the six men was left-handed. Say, what does ambidextrous mean?

Cabin 01: Barranca, Steve and Sandy, Jimmy and Ruth.

Cabin 02: Wilson, Marty, Selma, Sissy and Marty.

Cabin 03: Rowland, Howard 'Sergeant', Beth, Sandra and Billy.

Cabin 04: Douglas, Jack, Moira, Jennifer and Joey.

Cabin 05: Jenkins, Randy, Belinda and Randy.

Cabin 06: Johnson, Matt, Emily, Sally, Geena and Matthew.

Cabin 07: Samuels, Maureen and Cervantes, Jose

Cabin 08: Cervantes, Manny, Maria, Manuel and Maria.

Cabin 09: Jacobs, John, Karen, Johnny and Julia.

Cabin 10: Ralston, Bob, Camille, Robby, Glenda and Rose.

Cabin 11: Larson, Dick, Rosemary and Tommy.

Cabin 12: Smith, Ronnie, Joann, Karen, Joann and William.

Cabin 13: Brown, Ronald, Linda, John and Brenda.

Cabin 14: Fitzgerald, Dan, Dawn, Shannon and Michelle.

Cabin 15: Peedan, Christopher, Patricia, Matthew and Daniel.

Cabin 16: McQueen, Terence "Terry", Barbara, Chad, Terry and Joshua.

Cabin 17: Hill, John, Katharine and Cleo.

Cabin 18: Olsen, Greg, Katherine, Erik, Lily and Chloe. (When cabin ready)

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Sunday, January 7, 2007... Year 2, Day 78 PT... Day 443 PT...

"Sorry it took so long to get the cabin ready, Greg," Matt apologized.

"I think that it was a miracle the way you got it finished so quickly," Greg replied. "Kathy and I really appreciate all of the hard work."

"With 6 more pairs of hands, we'll get done a whole lot sooner," Matt said. "What did you do for a living?"

"I worked in a hospital," Greg said.

"So, tell me John why is it that your wife looks so familiar?" Jack asked.

"I don't know, Jack," John replied. "Everyone says the same thing."

"John Hill, huh?" Sergeant said. "Something mighty familiar about that name."

"I get a lot of that, but I worked on a ranch," John said.

"What kind of contracting did you do Terry?" Randy asked.

“Nothing special, Randy,” Terry replied, “I usually took any job that was offered.”

“We still have to give each of you folks an M16A3/M203 and a police shotgun,” Jack pointed out. “Those M21 rifles are pretty fancy; where did you come by those?”

“Well, Jack, to be perfectly candid, we promised that we wouldn’t say,” Terry said. “We all received those guns as a gift, isn’t that right fellas?”

The nodding heads confirmed that reply. In the back of his head, Jack was thinking 6’ tall, brown and brown and left handed. It might just be a coincidence, but he was going to start paying closer attention those men. And to a man, these guys were smooth. Close cropped hair, all in good shape and they mostly looked like poster Marines.

“Now let me explain about the defenses we’ve built to protect this compound,” Jack went on. “We have the inner barbed wire barrier. Whatever you do, don’t go beyond that. On the other side of the fence are the logs and in front of those are remotely controlled Claymore mines. About 50-yards out, there is a minefield that goes to the 900-yard mark. 800 of those 850-yards are filled with Bouncing Betty’s and they are totally randomly sown and unmapped. The last 50 yards are sown with concussive mines that might or might not kill you. We have cameras on all of the towers monitoring the west, north and east approaches. The south approach is a sheer cliff that the tower guards can watch. Each tower has a bucket of hand grenades and we’ll teach you how to time them. In addition, each tower has a 40mm machine gun and a Squad Automatic Weapon. Some of the Hummers are mounted with .50 caliber machine guns and we also have some 7.62mm machine guns. Any questions so far?”

“It sounds like this place is impregnable,” Terry said.

“Maybe,” Jack grimaced, “But George S. Patton, said that *fixed fortifications are monuments to man’s stupidity*. We only built this level of protection after we were attacked and almost wiped out.”

“How did you pull that one out of the fire?” Chris asked.

“Believe it or not, we were rescued by the 10th Calvary,” Sergeant answered.

“These days, I believe anything,” Ron said.

“Matt, what’s your best guess on when the cabins will be finished?” Jack asked.

“Figure maybe 2½ or 3 a week, Jack,” Matt answered. “We have a good start on number 18 so that leaves 14½ to go. Maybe the middle of February, maybe sooner. Are you in a rush?”

“No, but sooner is always better,” Jack replied. “We have 2 men out each day on patrol and Steve is gone more than he’s here doing the medical stuff. Plus, we have one man in the central guard tower 24/7 so I’d just like to see it done.”

“You don’t have all of the towers manned 24 hours a day?” Dan asked. “Sounds to me like you’re inviting trouble.”

“The center tower is 5’ taller than the others and it can cover the entire compound,” Jack explained. “You’ll know if there’s trouble, we got a battle claxon that goes bong, bong, bong, bong... If you hear that, you get to your assigned battle station ready to fight. I’ll make battle station assignments after I see how everyone performs on the range. The wives and every young person age 15 and up is expected to help defend this enclave.”

Jack had the information on the people and they had added 20 members to the militia force. That moved the fighting force from 30 to 50 or about 70% of the population. Better make that 49, Maureen was in no condition to fight. 68% was still pretty darn good. They spend the week doing patrols and building cabins and come the weekend, they’d finally see how everyone could shoot.

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Saturday, January 13, 2007... Year 2, Day 84 PT... Day 449 PT...

Cabins number 18-21 were done and they only had 11 more to do. That should take 2 weeks, maybe 3. It was time to get those 20 people on the range and see what they could do. Jack figured he’d get the men out of the way first and next the wives and finally the kids. All of the men shot well, but nothing spectacular. It was a 300-yard range so they let them sight in at 100, fire a string of shots, adjust their aim for 200 and repeat all of the way to 300-yards. Some of the guys almost acted like they’d never shot a rifle before and some had some bad habits to unlearn. It took longer than expected with the men.

Now the ladies were either rank amateurs or rather good shots. The rank amateurs were easy to teach because they didn’t have to be untaught before they could be taught how to do things the proper way. Each group fired a course with the M1A and M16 out to 300-yards and the shotgun at 50-yards. Pistol fire was reserved for the following weekend. From 9am-1pm the men fired and from 2pm until 5pm the ladies fired. The youngsters had been told not to come back after lunch because this was taking longer than planned.

Sunday, January 14, 2007... Year 2, Day 85PT... Day 450 PT...

They handled all 8 youngsters at once and they started at 1pm and were done by 4pm. As usual, there was the non-denomination church service, conducted without the benefit of a pastor at 10am on Sunday morning in the community building. This particular group of people didn’t wear their religion like a cloak. It was just a personal thing that they did

and it wasn't anybody else's business. If there was some reason you couldn't make it or didn't feel like going, then you didn't go. If you wanted to attend church and had the duty, there was always an available substitute that would cover for you during the hour-long service. They really practiced freedom of religion. The only person allowed to preach was the preacher and they didn't have one. Going to church doesn't make you a good anything, in and of itself, just as not going to church didn't label you as a bad anything. It was how you behaved that counted.

Historically, a whole lot of fights were about religion, politics and property ownership. Nobody gave a red rats butt about politics, especially now, and freedom of religion included the freedom to not be preached to unless you wanted to be preached to. No one owned any property except Steve and the enviro-wacko so there weren't any property issues to argue over. And the basic rules made it pretty darned clear that what was yours was yours and nobody else's. And if that didn't work, they could always call in Bubba to settle a dispute. And nobody wanted to deal with Big Bad John. Period. Of course if they'd seen the way that Jennifer and Joey had him wrapped around their little fingers, they might have thought differently. But not for long, just ask Jose.

Jose was staying with Maureen, not living with her. She needed a helping hand, as she got closer to her due date in March. They hadn't talked further about marriage but they had managed to get to the hand holding stage. It was probably just a matter of time. Now, it turns out that Greg worked in a hospital all right, he'd been holding back a little to see how things played out. He finally asked Steve if it would be ok for him to accompany Steve on his medical calls. Under close scrutiny, it came out that it was actually Greg Olsen, MD. Greg had been concerned that lacking all of the latest medical equipment, he might have someone blame him for not being able to save someone who'd taken 3 rifle bullets through the heart. He'd stopped to help a motorist back before and despite providing the best care possible under the circumstances eventually the motorist had died. The family had sued and the judgment far exceeded his liability coverage. His wife, Katherine, had done some modeling, working under the name Kathy and using her maiden name.

Keep thinking folks; there were some famous people here. It was just that they looked so different in person. And, one of the people among the group worked in the entertainment industry and he knew who every last one of them was. But, if they wanted to remain incognito, it wasn't any business of his. And when those 4 cops finally put their heads together they figured out who the actor was that was using the assumed name. The actor had played a doctor in a movie and they knew all about that famous murder case where the doctor had disappeared. There had been 2 books written about the Texas murder: "Blood and Money" and "Prescription Murder". Joan Robinson Hill died after a mysterious illness. Her husband was tried for her murder, which resulted in a mistrial. He was murdered afterwards but was later seen in Mexico. And Katharine Hill had played Joan Robinson Hill in the movie. But that wasn't the movie where they met and ended getting up married. Come on you movie fans who is John Hill and who is Kathy Owens? That will eliminate a pair of suspects, won't it?

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Saturday, January 20, 2007... Year 2, Day 91 PT... Day 456 PT...

The quiet man did reasonably well with the pistol, but wasn't spectacular. No sense in attracting attention by being too good or too bad. It even helped to ask a couple of dumb questions the previous weekend since he wasn't supposed to be that familiar using the rifle he'd received as a gift. It was a gift all right, from the USMC. Using only a single weapon allowed Jack to get the men, women and children through the pistol course in a single day.

Cabins 22-24 were done and cabins 25-27 were framed but the roof trusses needed to go on and they needed to be closed in. As people became accustomed to work that they'd never done before, the hammer hit the nail a lot more times and it took fewer swings. There weren't enough of the powered nail drivers to go around and some work was hammer work anyway. It had snowed, but Randy had used the Dozer to clear it all away. And, the 120,000-gallons of water had been accumulated over several days. The ladies were doing the guard duty in the central tower and even a single pair of extra hands helped just that much more. The ladies in the tower had offset losing Greg's help; and now that there was a real doctor available, they were screening the calls for medical assistance. When there hadn't been a doctor, people got by. Now that there was, some people were slipping into old habits.

Everyone was sent to the range to get in more practice. It now was necessary to begin reloading ammo. They hadn't done it because they hadn't had a lot of time and with this type of equipment, Steve said that they should wait until they could make a large production run. They started out with the 7.62x51mm and when it was done, broke for lunch. After lunch, they reloaded the 30-06 and the 5.56x45mm. Jack was learning as they went. The following day, they'd do the various pistol calibers. There was far less of the pistol ammo to reload, but more calibers so it hopefully would work out ok. The shotgun ammo would have to wait for the following weekend, but there wasn't really all that much to reload. Maybe 150 rounds of 20-gauge and 300 rounds of 12-gauge needed to be reloaded. They fired several randomly selected cartridges out of each batch and it appeared that the hand loads were close to match grade. Close, but not quite match grade because match grade ammo needed a powder scale to measure every powder load.

They had picked up primers, powder and bullets every time they were anywhere near someplace that carried the stuff. It wasn't so much that they needed the ammo as it was that if they ever got into some prolonged firefight, it would be a pretty poor time to think about reloading. By the end of the weekend, they were down to the shotgun shells and the ammo that had been burned up on Saturday. Better to spend the time now than wait until they were under fire to discover that they should have done it sooner. Lots of steps involved, Jack learned. Cleaning the cases, full length resizing, checking case length, etc. Full length resizing might shorten the case life slightly, Steve explained, but it was needed to make sure that the cartridges would fit all of the rifles.

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Monday, January 22, 2007... Year 2, Day 93 PT... Day 458 PT...

Jack finally realized what that building project was that he'd been observing through the camera down in the valley. Here the government was, 15 months after the end of the world, building a camp. FEMA was probably behind that, he surmised. That didn't make any sense; they were about 14 months late. The rather chaotic camp the Army had set up had fallen apart when the Army hadn't been able to resupply the camp. People had started slipping away and eventually there'd been more soldiers than people they were supposed to be helping. Then, overnight, the Army had inexplicably pulled out. Was it trouble in Los Angeles?

There didn't seem to be any signs of any organized industry. The few shops that had opened had been forced to close their doors when they'd run out of goods. All except the cottage industries. Some of these folks were gatherers, collecting things of use for redistribution and deriving a little value for their efforts. Others had turned hobbies into producing something people needed. It wasn't like all of those arts and craft shows where people had sold things they made that had looked 'cute' but had no intrinsic value. It was more like a swap meet in many cases.

Work had resumed on cabins 25-27 and with good luck cabins 28-30 would be framed and closed in by the end of the week. Unless Matt changed his mind again and just framed all 5 remaining cabins. It sort of depended on what the weather was like and it had been good for a while.

Jack switched from the valley cam to the north-pointing cam on the central tower. What he saw, he realized, was surreal and slightly depressing. Back in 2005, the cabin was a retreat nestled in the woods in the mountains. Now, the compound was almost like a prison surrounded by barbed wire and hundreds or thousands of land mines. The logs up against the fence assured them of a supply of firewood for a couple of years or more and removal of the trees hopefully precluded another assault like the one they'd barely made it through. Wind-blown seeds would eventually start new trees in the cleared area and the forest would return. Nice forest too, filled with deadly land mines!

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Tuesday, January 23, 2007... Year 2, Day 94 PT... Day 459 PT...

"I can't see why we're keeping up the patrols," Sergeant had said the previous day when he and Manny had returned. "We're just burning fuel. With the communities equipped with radios, all they really need us for is major problems and medical concerns. Maybe we should think about cutting back the patrols to a couple of days a week."

"I think I agree with Sergeant," Steve voiced. "We could get some radios out of some patrol cars, locate some antennas and give each community a more powerful radio. We may not be getting all of the calls anyway."

"I screwed up," Bob had said next. "I forgot about the towers when I counted the number of phone stations. We need the phone at the drawbridge, one for each cabin, one for each tower and one for each shelter. If you add it up, it comes to 39, not 36."

"Can you fix the problem?" some had asked.

"With a trip to the valley, yes," Bob had replied.

The end result was that they cancelled further patrols with the exception of Wednesdays that was now Steve and Greg. Instead, they went to the valley to get parts to fix the phones and additional phones. They could expand the phone system to 3 times its original capacity, 48 phones. While they were at it they looked around for more of the cartridge components to replace what they'd used while reloading. Only 4 of them went because they still had the cabins to finish. They had time when they got back, so Steve showed Jack how to reload the shotgun shells and they reloaded them and all of the brass from the weekend.

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Wednesday, January 24, 2007... Year 2, Day 95 PT... Day 460 PT...

"It might be a good time to drive back up north and get those beef cattle and turkeys," Jack suggested. "Which one was Mort and which one was Jack?"

"The hog farmer was Mort and the beef farmer was Jack," Sergeant laughed.

"What was the chicken farmer's name?" Jack asked.

"Don't recall, Jack," Sergeant said, "I don't believe we ever got beyond calling him 'Mister'."

"Where should we start?" Jack asked.

"With the chicken farmer, Jack" Sergeant suggested, "Birds of a feather..."

"Where was he again?" Jack wanted to know.

"Up by Buttonwillow," Sergeant said.

"Maybe we can trade some guns for some turkeys," Jack suggested.

"You already decided that a while back," Sergeant said.

“I did?” Jack responded. “Then it must be a good idea, huh?”

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Thursday, January 25, 2007... Year 2, Day 96 PT... Day 461 PT...

They were off again looking for food in the San Joaquin valley. They took all of the remaining gold and silver and about 40 guns to trade. It was Jack, Sergeant, Jose, Manny, Josh and John. They were driving 3 pickups and pulling 3 trailers, 2 that were divided into stalls and had the chicken cages. Their first stop was the Chicken Man whose name turned out to be Jeff. Jeff told them where to find turkeys and bought 2 rifles for five gold coins. The turkey man, his name was Charlie, traded them 50 turkeys for a gun, magazines and ammunition. After spending a night in Pixley, they looked up Jack, the cattle farmer.

“I can sell a lot of those guns, if you have any more,” Jack the farmer said.

“We’re looking for beef,” Big Bad John replied.

“How about 3 rifles a head?” Jack suggested.

“How about 5 rifles for 2?” Big John replied.

That worked and they got 8 head of beef for 20 rifles. They still had $(40-2-1-20=17)$ 17 rifles and for a mass purchase, Big John let them go for 2 Eagles apiece. At the moment, they were ahead 34 Eagles, 8 head of beef and 50 turkeys. So they went to see Mort, the pig farmer, and bought 10 market weight hogs for 5 Eagles. You could let nature take its course and get more livestock, but you couldn’t plant a seed and grow a gun. And, those automatic and semi-automatic weapons were in great demand in California.

It seems that there weren’t any markets to establish the price of gold so the farmers in the northern valley kept the price at a constant \$500/ounce. What varied was the price of the livestock according to the law of supply and demand. Sergeant was going to be busy for a while, 16 days of cutting up beef, 10 days of butchering hogs and someone else could butcher the turkeys. Plus they had quite a pile of rawhide that they could tan and turn into leather as soon as they figured out how. Not everyone in the world knows about brain tanning a hide, you know.

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Saturday, January 27, 2007... Year 2, Day 98 PT... Day 463 PT...

They were back home, having driven straight through. They killed a steer, skinned it and hung it to age. They salted the hide and put it with the others they’d salted and stored.

That was all they knew to do until they could find a book on tanning at a library somewhere. Those 8 fat cattle and 10 hogs would fill the freezers pretty well plus they had enough turkeys for several special occasions.

Summary:

+ 8 cattle,
+10 hogs,
+50 turkeys,
+29 Gold Eagles and
-40 rifles (with magazines and ammo.)

Cabins 28-32 were framed and 28-30 closed in. Cabins 19-27 were finished and sitting empty, each with an electric heater running to keep them warm enough so the pipes wouldn't freeze. Matt claimed that if they had enough helping hands and a good week, the cabins would all be finished by February 3rd. They'd started with 48 Eagles, gone down to 23 and now had 52 plus 5 old silver dollars and all of their silver coins. They had 11 butcher cattle, probably yielding 700-750 pounds each of meat, with 3 butchered and in the freezers and one hanging to age. They'd put up 4 hogs and 50 chickens and had 7 more steers and 10 more hogs to kill and butcher plus 50 turkeys.

In another week, they have the 5 cabins done, giving them 14 empty cabins. Anyone who tried a straight infantry type assault was in for a rude awakening. Tanks, artillery and missiles might be a different story. Thus, even though they didn't expect another war, it sure wouldn't hurt to have those shelters finished. They hadn't really picked up any armaments from Barstow that would stop an attack like that. On the other hand, Barstow was still where it had always been and maybe, just maybe, they ought to do something about defending against tanks and artillery besides building shelters.

The extra electricity from the finished but empty cabins was being fed back into their grid to supply electricity for the well pump and the hydrant pump, if needed. However, once they had all 32 cabins occupied, they would need a source of power for those pumps. The storage building and the community center were oriented north-south, disabusing the notion of putting solar panels on them, assuming they had them in the first place. As it was, there were just enough solar panels to finish the cabins.

"Jack, I think it might be a good idea if we picked up another RS 12000 for the shelter on the west end," Randy suggested. "Your RS 30000 can go in the middle shelter. I was thinking that the middle shelter could be 60' wide and 120' long. What do you think?"

"Randy, the original shelter was set up with 5 small bedrooms, each holding 2 people," Jack replied. "That was about 180 square feet per person. We have 18 cabins filled with 72 people for an average population density of about 4 persons per cabin. 32 times 4 is 128 and if the west shelter is built the same as the original shelter, we'd end up putting 128 minus 20 people in the center shelter. 108 people at 180 square feet per person

would make a shelter of 19,440 square feet. You can't go any wider, but you can go longer. We're going to need to make that shelter 60 wide and 324 feet long."

"That's a lot of rebar and concrete, Jack," Randy said. "And that's one hell of a lot of $\frac{3}{4}$ " plate. Fontana Steel should have plenty of rebar lying around and I'm sure we can get the concrete from one of the Ready-mix plants. Where to get the $\frac{3}{4}$ " plate, I'm not sure."

"There are other things to consider Randy," Steve pointed out. "We can't order blast doors or air circulation systems from Utah. And, we're going to need to put one or both of those large generators in the center shelter if it's going to be that big. We're also going to need to find a lot more of those military surplus bunk beds."

"There were bunk beds at Barstow," Jack replied, "So that problem is solved. We'll just have to look around for more plate or use plywood and support the ceiling with more columns. That circulation system is nothing more than a big blower, filters and a blast valve so why can't we find a blower and put in a series of HEPA filters? We can use steel plates for a blast valve, can't we? Or, are we expecting another nuclear attack?"

"Good God, I sure hope not," Steve said. "But Jack that's a lot of air. 19,440 square feet 8' high is 155,520 cubic feet. Say you swap that once an hour. You'd be moving 2,592 cubic feet of air per minute. 19,440 square feet is almost 11 times bigger than the original shelter. We'd need something like a dozen of those LUWA systems, one for the west shelter and 11 for the central shelter."

"If we were to assume that all 128 people were in one shelter," Randy said, "We would need a shelter of about 23,040 square feet. That would be 60' wide by 384' long. Hell, say 400' so the math is easier. That would take 24,000 square feet of concrete 6" thick for the floor and ceiling plus 7,260 square feet of concrete 6" thick for the walls. 55,260 times .5 is 27,630 cubic feet of concrete or, uh, 1,023 yards. It's only 85 loads of concrete, so we could manage that. Now, if we were to use the original shelter as our powerhouse, we'd have all of the floor space in the large shelter to use. And, we'd only be building one new building and only have one large hole to dig."

"Sounds good to me," Steve said, "But that begs the question on the air supply, and you just made the problem worse by rounding up. Now were talking 192,000 cubic feet of air per hour or 3,200 cubic feet per minute."

"I have a plan, trust me on this," Randy laughed. "Is it a go?"

Randy had gotten the original shelter put together quickly and for free, except for the stuff they had to buy like the blast doors and the LUWA air circulation system. He wouldn't have all of his construction buddies to help him this time, but Jack was willing to go along because he'd worked for and with Randy for a very long time. Jack could almost visualize the gears turning in Randy's head.

"Beats the hell out of living in a cave for 9 months," the quiet man thought.

Big John – Chapter 22 – The Great Big Shelter

Saturday, February 3, 2007... Year 2, Day 105 PT... Day 470 PT...

By early afternoon, the final cabin, #32, was done and the heater left on to keep those pipes warm. It was truly a cause for celebration because there wasn't room to build any more cabins without moving a minefield so they felt like they had accomplished something. It was cold and snowing and the wind was whipping the snow, simulating blizzard like conditions. A few brave souls bundled up and went to the community building but most folks just stayed home and put on a pot of chili or stew. That was cold weather food. Recipes had been shared and the fine art of making a good loaf of bread pretty well mastered by all of the ladies. Then, they got a radio call and Steve and Greg had to go set a broken leg that was a multiple compound fracture.

It wasn't fit enough weather to really even walk down to that community building and the visibility was maybe 100', but you know how those codependents are. There was plenty of survival gear in the Hummer and they had both a vehicle radio and Handy Talkies. They somehow made it to Lake Arrowhead and radioed back that they would have to spend the night. They wouldn't be coming home until there was a break in the weather. Randy was excitedly showing Jack the plans he'd worked out for the new shelter and what he had in mind to filter the air. Very simple but effective, but you had to remember that they'd bought that book from Utah Shelter Systems so it wasn't a new invention, rather more of an adaptation of the rock crib used as a pre-blast valve.

Randy proposed to build a concrete column about 4' square with the bottom of the box level with the shelter slab. The box would open into the shelter in a 4' square opening that was covered with fence fabric. There would be a series of replaceable filters that could be changed from inside of the shelter. That 4'x4' by 16' tall column would be filled with 6-8" rocks and could be covered by a triple layer of ¾" plate welded together. A large blower would be installed in front of the filters to draw air into the shelter. This would create a slight overpressure within the shelter and Randy told Jack that was good. The air would move through the shelter and through a long culvert to the original shelter and be exhausted from there. Randy said they needed a connection for the electricity anyway and if push came to shove they'd have an emergency egress.

The whole thing would need some refining, but that was the basic plan. They were going to end up with a lot of extra dirt, on the order of 200,000 cubic feet, but they could bulldoze that into the ravine. The overhead would be created using pre-stressed concrete so they could get by with a single row of columns for support. They would need a crane to set the 60' long by 10' wide slabs into place and there would be 40 of the slabs. One common method of pre-stressing concrete is with a tube, tapered ferrule and cable and that was what Randy proposed. The roof slabs would be poured, allowed to cure, stressed and then lifted into place. The concrete would be the stuff with the fiberglass admixture and Randy would use an accelerator.

Which was all very interesting to Jack, but it was the middle of the winter, for crying out loud. It would take one load of concrete for each of those 40 slabs. Then Randy started in on how he was going to pour the concrete walls using slip form construction and Jack put on his coat and went home to Moira and the kids. Very exciting stuff that slip form construction, to a guy like Randy. Jack played with the kids, sharpened his Bowie, cleaned his Ruger Vaquero revolvers, ate supper and he and Moira retired early. Too much excitement for one day, I guess.

And all this time, no one had tipped to who Mrs. Kathy Owens was. But, the Deputies knew who John Hill really was and made him a present of a Ruger Vaquero and a cowboy hat so he could dress his normal part. And, if you knew who John Hill really was, then you just naturally knew who Mrs. John Hill really was. They appeared in 7 movies together, had been married for 22 years and it was a first marriage for both of them.

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Monday, February 5, 2007... Year 2, Day 107 PT... Day 472 PT...

Steve and Greg made it back late Sunday evening. And Randy announced that 1. Belinda was expecting; and, 2. He was taking a crew down below and pour those 40 pre-stressed concrete slabs. All he wanted was a detail to come along and provide protection for him and his crew while they completed the overhead sections. It rarely snows in the valley and you can pour concrete all year long. Besides which, staying in the valley a few days would give them time to look around. There were a couple of other problems they should address. For instance, all of that fuel they had sitting down at the east end was an open invitation for someone to blow them to Kingdom Come with a little rocket.

In California – home to 27 million vehicles and more than 9,500 gas stations – MTBE has contaminated 10,000 shallow groundwater sites, including 1,000 in the Bay Area. It has also been found in dozens of the state's lakes and reservoirs, including Shasta, Tahoe and Donner in the north and Castaic, Pyramid and Perris in the south.

"Would you look at this," Jack said. "I wondered where they got all of those tanks they were using to replace the leaking fuel tanks in all of the gas stations."

"We need to get that lowboy and start hauling those up to the cabins," Sergeant suggested. "There must be ... 16, 17, 18 of those suckers. Man, they'll fit in the area where we have all of the fuel tankers and we can park the propane tanks on top of them."

"Sergeant we need to do something with the propane, too," Jack suggested, "But at least this is a start. How big are they?"

"Uh, the tag says 18,000-gallons," Sergeant replied.

"18 times 18 is 324,000 gallons," Jack said. "We can put in say 12 for diesel and 6 for gas?" (324,000)

"Works for me," Sergeant chuckled. "Now you know that Randy won't stop what he's doing to bury those tanks, don't you?"

"We'll stack them in the way of where he's putting in the new shelter and he won't have a choice, will he?" Jack responded.

Since they had 2 semi tractors available, they looked until they found a second lowboy. They also found a crane that was large enough to handle Randy's slabs and small enough to get over the drawbridge without collapsing it. They left the larger crane sitting right there at the fuel tank storage facility. With 2 semis and 2 lowboys, it only took them Tuesday through Thursday to move the new tanks and park them right in Randy's way. Randy had nothing to complain about, they'd found his crane for him.

"Jack, look at this," Sergeant said handing him an old newspaper.

For Sale: (3) PROPANE STORAGE TANKS - 42,000 Gallons Each - 250 PSI

"So what, Sergeant?" Jack asked, "It's just an old newspaper ad."

"Look at the date of the paper," Sergeant suggested.

"October 20, 2005," Jack read aloud. "Hell, that was right before..."

"...the end of the world," Sergeant finished. "The tanks are in an industrial area in Fontana. I'm betting they're empty because they're for sale. What do you think?"

"I think that if we can get them moved, Randy is going to have to install them too before he can put in the shelter," Jack grinned.

"We won't know until we go look at them," Sergeant said.

"Where in God's name did you find an old newspaper?" Jack asked.

"I saved it as a souvenir," Sergeant said, "From back when things were normal."

"Sergeant, things haven't been normal since long before 2005," Jack observed.

"Yeah, but you know what I mean," Sergeant replied.

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Friday, February 9, 2007... Year 2, Day 111 PT... Day 476 PT...

“Long suckers,” Sergeant said, “They must be about 80’ long. How are we going to move those?”

“Easy, Sergeant,” Jack replied, “I’ll just tell Randy that it’s impossible. I’ll also tell him that he can’t use our new crane unless he figures out how to move them. Between me telling him it can’t be done and his wanting to get the shelter done, I think he can find a way.”

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“It’s no big deal, Jack,” Randy said. “They didn’t manufacture the tanks on site. But, I’ll have to think about it. When do you want the tanks moved?”

“Right after you install the 18 new 18,000-gallon service station tanks and get them plumbed to the fuel pumps,” Jack answered.

“What 18 new tanks?” Randy asked.

“The 18 new tanks that Sergeant and I found on Monday and spent Tuesday through Thursday moving up to the cabin,” Jack explained.

“But the only open space up at the cabins is the area that we were going to use to... Tell me you didn’t,” Randy said.

“I’d like to tell you that, but I’d be lying,” Jack responded.

“But that’s not fair,” Randy insisted. “You knew that I was going to start excavating as soon as I had these slabs done.”

“You still are, Randy,” Jack agreed, “The only thing is, you’re not going to be excavating where you planned to be excavating.”

“How did you move those tanks?” Randy asked.

“We used your new used crane,” Sergeant answered.

“Oh,” Randy said. “Well, it won’t be for a while; we’re only making 2 slabs a day.”

“That’s all right Randy,” Sergeant chuckled. “The tanks will be sitting right there whenever you get the slabs done.”

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Saturday, February 10, 2007... Year 2, Day 112 PT... Day 477 PT...

Randy apparently decided that he needed to spend some time with Belinda or something because when they got the 10th slab finished on Friday after Jack and Sergeant left, he and his crew came home. Several people helped and all of the tanks on wheels were moved early Saturday morning. They were spotted behind the new tanks, but still in the way of the shelter project. Randy took the hint and fired up the backhoe and started excavating. Jose got on the dozer and pushed the dirt over near the ravine. Randy worked until dark and went home. Sunday morning he started in again and by evening he had an area large enough to hold the tanks excavated.

"There's your hole," Randy said. "I won't be able to put the tanks in until next weekend."

"No problem Randy," Jack said. "Why did you leave that open area at the back and not excavate there?"

"Well the fuel area is 195' wide," Randy explained. "I figured that we could put those big tanks in at the back on solid ground. We'll put them 2 across and start a second row. Then if you find any more of the tanks, you'll have room to put in up to 3 more. There's room for 2 across and 3 layers deep. And, once those are in, I'll pour a slab over the underground fuel tanks while we're building the shelter to protect them. I'm also going to pour a wall on the north side of the propane tanks to protect them in case we're attacked. I'll have the slabs done by March 3rd."

"Thanks Randy," Jack said to Randy's retreating back. "Sergeant, can we get those tanks up that fire road?"

"Getting them up isn't the problem, Jack, I checked," Sergeant replied. "The problem is making the turn at the top. We have enough room by about 10' to make the turn."

"Don't say anything to Randy, but we'll get the tanks in starting tomorrow and do the plumbing," Jack urged. "Then, when he comes home next weekend to bury the tanks, we have them buried, covered over and filled. He can really have a weekend with Belinda."

"Ok by me," Sergeant agreed.

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Monday, February 12, 2007... Year 2, Day 114 PT... Day 479 PT...

Randy and his crew left just after sunup to get down to the valley and build the next 10 slabs. They were going to be a challenge to get up the fire road too. They were a little wider than the 3 tanks and a little shorter. The tanks actually measured 78' long. Sergeant and Jack got a crew together and they set the tanks by noon. They were in one row but 6 of the tanks were offset slightly forward about 4' so they could run the gas distribution line directly to the gas pump. There were 12 new tanks in parallel with the existing diesel tank Randy had originally installed and 6 new tanks in line with the existing

gas tank. By evening all of the plumbing was completed and Jose said that he'd push the dirt back over the tanks on Tuesday and the leftover dirt down into the ravine.

Tuesday, February 13, 2007... Year 2, Day 115 PT... Day 480 PT...

Jose completed the grading and compacting by noon and after lunch he started disposing of the excess dirt. The others started filling the tanks. By evening, all of the gas tanks and diesel tanks had been emptied into the new tanks except for those 3 300-gallon tankers that Randy used in his construction business and the 500-gallon diesel tanker. The new tanks were nowhere near full. That really wasn't a problem because they had those large Chevron tankers that they could haul fuel from the distributors to the mountain. They discussed it among themselves and decided to go down to the valley on Wednesday and try and pickup 32,000-gallons of diesel and 16,000-gallons of gasoline at a time until they had the tanks filled.

The thinking was that they might not need that much gasoline but who knew what the next 14 families would have for vehicles. They'd had exhausted their supply of Hummers at the Armory and weren't really planning on getting any more. They still hadn't made that trip to Barstow either. But, they didn't really have a place to store the bunk beds and the thinking was that they would just pull 2 semi-trailers up there and get everything at once. They could have put in the wall the following week, but decided to just let Randy put it in with his slip form method of construction. Maybe he could put the wall in for practice before he tackled the shelter.

There was over 45,000-gallons of propane remaining in the 12 delivery trucks, Jack's 5,000-gallon tank on wheels and the 9,200-gallon tanker. And, there were enough of the 100# tanks to have 2 for every cabin and 6 for the community building and 6 for the storage building, a total of 76. Once those 3 42k tanks were in, it would only take a few trips with the vehicles to fill the propane storage tanks. Then, by golly, their preparations would be almost finished. The consensus was that once the shelter was completed, they could content themselves by keeping everything topped off and growing food. They would be gentlemen farmers, from those Yuppies point of view.

Those 1,400-gallons of diesel in their small tankers would be their bugout fuel if push came to shove. It sure would have been nice if The Three Amigos had given them the exact location of that Underground City of theirs. All they'd been told was that it was somewhere north of Blythe on route 95 in Riverside County. In a full out bugout situation, they could mount the 4 Mk-19's, the 4 Ma Deuce's and the 4 M240s on the Hummer's. On that next trip to Barstow they could add 9 additional Ma Deuces or M240s or a combination of both so all 21 of the remaining Hummers would be light weapon systems. Who knew, maybe they could find a couple of those M1046A1 BGM-71E TOW 2A TOW equipped Hummers at Barstow. They needed something to counter any tank or artillery fire they might receive.

Wednesday, February 14, 2007... Year 2, Day 116 PT... Day 481 PT...

Two fuel runs completed and they added 64,000-gallons of diesel and 32,000-gallons of gas. They started out with the stabilizer in the tanker before refilling the tankers so the fuel was stabilized and putting it in the new underground tanks just mixed it better. One more day like that and Jack figured they would have about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the fuel. They talked about the large generators and decided to leave one sitting where it was and put the backup up unit in the shelter when they built it. They'd get Randy to hold off putting in the last slab until they could get all of the equipment and supplies into the shelter.

"I'm just surprised that we haven't been attacked more times than we have," Jack told Sergeant.

"Wasn't that one time enough?" Sergeant bounced back.

"That's not the point," Jack retorted. "Most of the food must be running low down there and I would have thought that more people would have come looking."

"Speaking of which," Sergeant said, "We need to take those 2 semis down and see about finding more staples. Maybe we can do that next week. We will have the diesel and gas filled out on Friday."

"Maybe we should, partner," Jack agreed. "We can't do anything about getting the propane until Randy has those tanks moved. You don't happen to have any more old newspapers lying around do you?"

"No, but I remember seeing 3 more tanks about the same size somewhere when I got called out on a call one time," Sergeant said. "I'll be flipped if I can remember where they were, though; some industrial plant. It'll come to me one of these days. I'll tell you one thing. It's going to take a lot of trips to fill up those 3 tanks. All we have is that 9,200-gallon tanker. That's near a full week of hauling 2 loads a day."

"We could speed things up if we used those delivery trucks," Jack suggested.

"We could, Jack, but that many vehicles on the road would attract a lot of attention," Sergeant pointed out.

Thursday, February 15, 2007... Year 2, Day 117 PT... Day 482 PT...

By the end of the day they only needed one more day to see the fuel tanks full. They needed to find more PRI-D and PRI-G to keep the fuel stabilized. PRI recommended re-dosing about every 9 months. They'd come up with an 18,000-gallon tank stick so they could stick the tanks and gauge their fuel inventory. They would need 108 gallons of PRI-D and 54 gallons of PRI-G to follow the manufacturer's recommendations. They needed to find a PRI distributor to get those kinds of quantities. Or maybe the warehouse for one of those auto parts store chains that sold the products. Sure would be nice to find the gallon jugs or the stuff in bulk.

“Why don’t we try a marina for the PRI products, Jack?” Marty suggested.

“Marty, that would be like walking into the Gates of Hell, wouldn’t it?” Jack answered.

“Maybe or maybe not, Jack,” Marty said. “Anyway, we could take a couple of the Hummers and a couple of tractor-trailers and hit that Albertson’s warehouse in Brea. It might be picked over and it might not. Sergeant could take whatever he might need to get another tractor running if we find one. Plus we could pull a couple of trailers with the Hummer’s.”

“Anybody know if Long Beach or San Pedro got hit?” Jack asked.

“I can answer that for you,” Chris said. “San Pedro took a hit and it’s right next door to Long Beach so I wouldn’t count on finding much there. Marina Del Rey apparently escaped getting hit.”

“There’s no way I’m going to Marina Del Rey,” Jack said.

“Well, what about up the coast to Ventura or Santa Barbara?” Chris suggested.

“We’ll make a separate trip to Ventura and if that doesn’t work out, we can try Santa Barbara,” Jack agreed. “So, what is on the agenda for tomorrow?”

“Finish filling the fuel tanks. Boy, I’ll bet Randy is going to be surprised.” Sergeant replied. “By the way, those other 3 propane tanks were in Colton. I just had to think about it for a while.”

Friday, February 16, 2007... Year 2, Day 118 PT... Day 483 PT...

Sergeant and Jack drove down to Colton while the others topped off the fuel. A different company manufactured the tanks so they were just a little bit bigger in diameter and 2’ shorter. They were the same capacity, however, about 42,000-gallons. Six 42k tanks would give them a propane capacity of around ¼ million gallons. Subtracting their current propane inventory meant that they would need about 207k gallons of propane, but these tanks were almost full so they would have to empty them before they could be moved.

“We’ll just empty these tanks to fill up our other 2 tanks,” Sergeant suggested. “That way, we can run a convoy of trucks and pull off the propane in one long day. It will take about 3 trips, but this is like a gift from Heaven. It would sure be nice to have another 3-dozen of those 100# bottles so we could assign one person to handling the propane.”

“I think that Ron said he knew a little bit about propane,” Jack replied. “We’ll have a talk with him and see if he wants to do that as his contribution to the compound.”

“Jack is this an enclave or a compound?” Sergeant asked.

“Yes,” Jack replied.

When Randy pulled in late Friday afternoon, he had a collection of protective pipes and covers for the fuel tank fill pipes.

“When did you do all of this?” Randy asked.

“We’ve busted our butts all week, Randy, but all of those tanks are full and stabilized,” Jack explained. “Sergeant and I found 3 more propane tanks, too. They’re about the same volume but slightly different dimensions. How did you make out this week?”

“We got 10 slabs poured and jacked the cables on the first 10 slabs so we’re half way there,” Randy replied. “Two more weeks of pouring and we’ll have the overheads done. Next weekend, I’ll bring up some dry mixed ready-mix and we’ll pour the slab over the tanks if you guys can have it formed up. I found a rig to do the slip form walls too, so maybe we can try and put in the wall before we put in the tanks. Anybody have any objections to working on the weekend?”

“I’ll put in those fill pipe covers,” Jose offered.

“When are Maureen and you going to get married?” Randy asked.

“Maybe after the baby comes, next month,” Jose said. “Maureen and her husband hadn’t been married all that long, you know. So, she seems to be adjusting faster than I would have thought. I think once she has the baby, she’ll have a different perspective and we’ll go ahead and get married. I don’t know where we can find a preacher though.”

“You don’t need a preacher, Jose,” the quiet man said. “My wife and I just exchanged vows. There aren’t really any laws anymore to obey anyway.”

Saturday, February 17, 2007... Year 2, Day 119 PT... Day 484 PT...

“You seem to be getting the hang of the rifle pretty well,” Jack observed.

“Jack there were all of these doohickeys to adjust, but once I got them figured out and adjusted, it got a whole lot easier,” the quiet man replied.

“Still, that’s some impressive shooting,” Jack said.

“Why thank you, Jack, that’s a nice complement,” the quiet man said. “Say, would there be any chance of extend the length of the range?”

“All you have to do is move back 100-yards,” Jack replied. “I think you can back up farther than you need though. When we laid it out, we left room for 1,000-yards.”

“That’s an awfully long shot,” the quiet man said. “But, I’ll work on it. Who knows, maybe someday I’ll be able to shoot that far.”

“Where did you get the M118 match ammo?” Jack asked.

“The man who gave us the rifles gave us each one case,” the quiet man explained. “Is there something wrong with it? Should I be using something else?”

“No, that rifle and scope are ballistically matched to that ammo, so stick with it,” Jack replied.

“Whatever you say, Jack,” the quiet man replied. “I’m new at this and it must just be beginners luck.”

The man who gave them the rifles also kept the other 19 cases of M118 ammo for himself. Giving the rifles and pistols away had been part of his cover, but he wasn’t about to give away all of that ammo that came from the same Lot and find himself in the position of needing to re-zero the rifle. In fact, he’d been getting ammo from the armory and trading it to the fellas he’d given the rifles to. He now had 22 cases of the M118 ammo, all from that same lot. But, he did need to get in some practice at a ‘decent’ range. The scope was calibrated out to 900 meters or 984 yards. The original M21 was an accurized M14 National Match (NM) semi-automatic rifle originally equipped with a Leatherwood 3X-9X Adjustable Ranging Telescope (ART). Most of the M21’s had been replaced by the M-24 SWS. Springfield Armory in Illinois had an M21 Tactical Rifle that is a Super Match with an adjustable stock.

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Monday, February 19, 2007... Year 2, Day 121 PT... Day 486 PT...

A crew of 8 got 2 semi tractors and trailers and headed to Brea. The Albertson’s warehouse was located on Harbor Boulevard. They got two truckloads of staples consisting of beans, rice and those 1,000-year shelf life dried pastas. Flour that sits too long gets a little buggy, lumpy and rancid. They checked it and it was beyond redemption. What they really needed was some wheat. All that took was a trip to a bread baking company who ground their own wheat. That presented another problem because the wheat was in bulk in a large silo. They looked around until they found one of those trailers that were used to transport vegetables like bulk onions and tomatoes. They filled it with wheat and spent a lot of time putting the wheat into 6-gallon containers and adding oxygen absorbers. On Thursday, they managed to make a second trip and pick up a second load of wheat and another load of the plastic pails and lids.

They now had more food than the storage building could hold and they were no longer getting canned goods except when they ran into something like the product line called ‘Real Canned Meats’. They took all of those that Albertson’s had, but it was only a few dozen cases. They spent the weekend packaging the wheat and by Saturday night, they

had 2 truckloads of wheat packed in 6-gallon pails in nitrogen. Which is what you get when you remove the oxygen from the air in the pails. They also made a trip to the store where Moira had worked and got the grinders the company carried to grind wheat. Each family would grind their own.

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Monday, February 26, 2007... Year 2, Day 128 PT... Day 493 PT...

Randy and his crew left early and Jack, Sergeant, Marty and Steve headed to Ventura to see about getting the PRI products. West Marine had stores in Santa Barbara, Oxnard and Ventura. By the time they finished, they had both 7'x14' trailers and the backs of the Hummers filled with PRI-G and PRI-D. On Tuesday, they went back and finished picking up the other half of the products they'd left in Oxnard and Ventura. That would cover them for a fairly long time and they could always look for more of the stores.

On Wednesday, they raked the ground smooth over the fuel tanks and put in the forms. They used a taunt string to make sure they had the fill pipe protectors at the right height. They had dug a trench and run a fuel line to the old shelter and had dug down and opened the roof to allow them to set the reserve generator into place. Randy would just have to close the roof back over. Matt had used plywood to build forms and had replaced the rebar so all that Randy would have to do is pour the concrete. They had also laid 2 sections of 36" culvert. Chris could weld, so he welded them together and they back filled the trench. They were ready Friday night when Randy and his crew showed up with 6 ready-mix trucks and the slip form machine that Randy had modified to be able to form 8' walls.

But, who is the quiet man? I actually told you. Did you miss it?

Big John – Chapter 23 – Who is the quiet man?

The quiet man was a professional killer. He'd never been married before and he was getting used to the idea of having a family and someone to care for. He had gone to such lengths to deceive everyone because he didn't want his past to catch up with him. However, there were 5 men who knew who gave away the rifles and pistols. It was probably just a matter of time until someone blabbed about that, but he wasn't going to do anything about it. He really did want to turn over a new leaf. And then in some sort of fluke, he'd met a woman who loved him, had the 'correct' first name and even had the proper assortment of children with the 'right' names. The person whose name he had borrowed had always gone by his middle name and not his first. He'd used the guy's middle name when he'd first met the woman and it was easy to explain why he hadn't used his first name.

Saturday, March 3, 2007... Year 2, Day 133 PT... Day 498 PT...

Randy had shown up with six loads of dry mixed concrete. They had the 40 slabs completed and just needed to let the last 10 slabs cure for a week so they could jack the cables. He figured that it would work out about right. It was going to take at least a week to excavate the 16' deep by 70' wide by 410' long hole. All he had was the backhoe, but they could run it 24/7 to get the hole dug. Jose was reasonably competent on the dozer and it wouldn't take him long to learn to use the backhoe. There were also lots of volunteers who wanted to learn to use the equipment anyway. It took one load of concrete to recover the original shelter and pour the slab over the tanks. They were using the same concrete mixture as they did for the slabs.

They used the first load and sealed the shelter and poured the slab. He didn't have to make the wall a continuous pour, but he decided to do it anyway. He wanted to see just how quickly he could put in the wall as a learning experience. If you went too slow you were wasting time and if you went too fast the wall would collapse. He started out slow and gradually accelerated the pace until the concrete looked like it might fall apart if he went any faster. From there, Randy backed off the pace a little and they did the wall in one continuous pour. They completed the wall on Sunday afternoon.

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Monday, March 5, 2007... Year 2, Day 135 PT... Day 500 PT...

Randy spent Monday teaching several men to use the backhoe. Jose went first and after he was trained, Jose began teaching others to use the dozer. It was a rather complicated process because the backhoe was in the way of the dozer. So, every time it came to move the backhoe, they'd back it off and let the dozer push the dirt in the general direction of the ravine. They developed a rhythm and the backhoe switched operators each time they moved it. They only really needed 3 men to operate the dozer anyway, doing 8-hour shifts. The backhoe had a reasonably large bucket for a backhoe/loader at 3 yards and a very long reach. Large backhoe/excavators used in mines sometimes

have buckets that can move over 40 yards of material at a time. It was a shame that they didn't have one of those babies.

The hole was to be 16'x70'x410'=459,200 cubic feet which is 17,007 cubic yards which is 5,669 bucket loads of dirt. Approximately. Because of the limitation on the reach of the machine, they had men in the hole with shovels shoveling dirt the backhoe missed. Talk about a backbreaking job! By the end of the day, Randy was estimating that it would take 41 days to complete the excavation. However, he also said that as soon as the hole was large enough, they should locate a second dozer to move the dirt. Any crane that could move those 10'x60'x6" slabs of concrete could certainly set a small dozer into the hole.

Tuesday, March 6, 2007... Year 2, Day 136 PT... Day 501 PT...

With the excavation now progressing satisfactorily without his help, Randy told Jack that they could start moving the propane tanks. Jack told Randy where they'd found the large crane that they'd used to load the tanks and Randy said that they'd use it first to move the tanks and then later to load the slabs. What Randy had in mind, he told Jack, was to support the tank on either end. The back end would be a dolly with steerable axles so they could negotiate the turns. The system was not unlike the M1070 tractor and M1000 semi-trailer that was used to transport Abrams tanks except that the rear dolly wasn't connected to the tractor and had a separate fellow doing the steering. Anyway, Randy said that it beat the hell out of looking for some other way to do it because he knew where he could get the transporter. It worked for Jack; all he wanted was the tanks in place. They loaded a small dozer onto a lowboy and took it up the mountain.

The process of moving the tanks consisted of several distinct steps:

1. Lift tank onto transport,
2. Lift tank supports onto lowboys,
3. Transport supports,
3. Install supports at compound,
4. Transport tank, and,
5. Set tank on tank supports.

Day 1 (Tuesday) moved tank 1 from Fontana and filled with 42k of propane on hand

Day 2 (Wednesday) moved tank 2 from Fontana and filled with 42k from Colton tank 1

Day 3 (Thursday) moved tank 3 from Fontana and filled with 42 k from Colton tank 2

Day 4 (Friday) moved crane and emptied Colton tank 3

Day 5 (Saturday) moved tank 1 from Colton and filled with 42k

Day 6 (Sunday) moved tank 2 from Colton and filled with 42k from distributor

Day 7 (Monday) moved tank 3 from Colton and filled with 42k from distributor

Day 8 (Tuesday) moved 12 3k transports and 9k transport to distributor and got final 2k to top off tank 6

Day 9 (Wednesday) party celebrating completion of propane storage project-everyone got one day off

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Thursday, March 15, 2007... Year 2, Day 145 PT... Day 510 PT...

Sitting on the slab was the 5,000-gallon rolling tank of propane and 4 trailers holding a total of 1,400-gallons of stabilized diesel. If need be, they could bugout on short notice, needing only to set Jack's RS 30000 on a pickup or a trailer. It seemed that Randy had other ideas. He took a trailer to hold the generator and one of Steve's 50' hoses and put that on the trailer along with his portable light stands and numerous extension cords. A trailer hitch was constructed for the tanker and it would pull the trailer with the generator. Then, to be doubly sure that nothing that could go wrong would go wrong, Randy constructed a trailer hitch on the back of the generator trailer so it didn't make any difference which was the cart and which was the horse. They added the 55 5-gallon cans of diesel fuel to the generator trailer so that was ready to go at all times.

Meanwhile, the hole for the shelter was getting bigger. 41 days of 8-hour shifts was what Randy was thinking when he made the estimate. However, they had been working 24/7 to finish the excavation. They took this weekend off because everybody wanted a break. Math time. If you figure 30 bucketful's of dirt an hour, than it would take 189 hours to dig that hole. 189 hours is just less than 8 24-hour days and they were only $\frac{3}{4}$ done. Must have not been getting the dirt out at the rate of 30 bucketful's an hour, huh? If they moved 4,252 bucketful's of dirt in 1 8-hour day and 8 24-hour days, they were only moving about $21\frac{1}{4}$ bucketful's and hour. But I could be wrong. Assuming they resume at 9am on Monday morning and work until it is finished, the hole will be dug by sometime after Midnight on Wednesday.

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Monday, March 19, 2007... Year 2, Day 149 PT... Day 514 PT...

Jose got the day off to be with Maureen who was recovering from delivering a 7 pound 7 ounce baby boy. She named the baby David John Samuels after her late husband. The way Jose was beaming, you'd have thought he was the father of the child. So, Randy took Jose's place excavating and he was dumping dirt at 30 buckets an hour. The other fellas sort of took that as a challenge and they could match, but not beat his performance. The hole was completed at just before 8am on Wednesday. Which was a very good thing because Matt and some others had the forms all ready to go for the foundation of the shelter walls. There was no particular reason to hurry, but seeing as how the guys had gotten the hole excavated early by about 16 hours, they worked until the forms for the footings were ready to pour.

Tuesday, March 20, 2007... Year 2, Day 150 PT... Day 515 PT...

The footings were 2' wide and 2' deep and there were 920' of footings. That's 3,680 cubic feet of concrete, or just a shade over 136 yards. The six trucks held a total of 72

yards of concrete and they need 11.35 loads of concrete. Each truck was sent down the hill and reloaded and the forms were filled in with a continuous pour on Tuesday. The concrete contained the fiberglass admixture and the accelerator. When each truck was emptied a second time, they were sent down the hill to reload. On Wednesday, Randy went down the hill and found 6 more concrete trucks. He had the time because the footings needed to cure and once they started to pour those walls, he wanted a continuous, or nearly continuous pour. They had poured 195' of wall behind the propane tanks in a little over 6 hours using a pour rate of 32 feet an hour. Randy had decided he'd be better off to slow the pour rate to 30' per hour meaning that 920' would take about 31 hours to pour plus the time it took to reposition the machine.

They were going to pour the south wall first, followed by the north wall followed by the west wall and finally the east. After the west wall was in, leaving the 4'square hole by pouring around a form, Matt and his crew would quickly frame up the 3 walls for that 4' square column against the west wall and they would pour it when they finished the east wall. Jose had found time to cover over the original shelter and re-compact the earth. They were going to simply screw a section of that 36" culvert into the center of the east end as soon as the slip form machine passed and then clean the concrete out of the culvert before it became too hard to work with. The culvert was lying in a trench and had been checked to make sure it was level with the footing.

Thursday, March 22, 2007... Year 2, Day 152 PT... Day 517 PT...

The machine had been lifted into the hole and was positioned over the center of the south footing. 30' an hour translated into 6" per minute. So while Matt used the dozer to hold a flat board against the end of the machine, Randy started the pour. He had calculated that since the form was 8' or 96" long he could start moving the machine in about 16 minutes. The machine had a sliding partition that would allow him to add concrete over those same 16 minutes. That way, once the partition reached the end of the form, it was time to begin moving the machine. At 8:16 am the machine began to move at the rate of 6" per minute and would do so until it covered 4,800". The south wall should take 13 hours and 20 minutes to pour if they had everything just right. They did.

At 9:04 pm, they slowly began to extend the partition while they withdrew the machine. At 9:20 the pour was through and they spend the next 40 minutes getting the machine repositioned over the center of the footing for the north wall. They started the pour at 10:00pm and at 10:16 the machine began to move. Jose and some of the others had started helping halfway through the 13 hour pour for the south wall and could handle things while Randy got some sleep. He asked Belinda not to let him sleep over 9 hours, but 8 hours later he was wide-awake. Randy went to the front porch and observed the pour. It seemed to be going smoothly so he got a cup of coffee and after a shower. Belinda had breakfast ready for him when he was cleaned up and dressed he ate his breakfast leisurely so they could have a few minutes together. Around 9:30 he finally went out to join Jack and the others.

"This wall should be done around 11:20am," Randy said.

“Good morning to you, too, Randy,” Jack laughed.

“Kiss my butt, Jack,” Randy replied.

“That’s better,” Jack laughed, “I thought maybe you were in a bad mood.”

“This whole thing is right on schedule and thanks to you, we have all of the fuel we’ll need for a very long time,” Randy grinned.

“Jack,” Sandy voice came over the radio, “We have people at the gate.”

“10-4, can you see who it is?” Jack asked.

“It’s those guys from Palmdale,” Sandy replied, “The Three Amigos, I think they called themselves.”

“I’ll go lower the drawbridge, Sandy. Could you ask Moira to put on some coffee in the community building?” Jack responded.

“10-4,” Sandy acknowledged.

“What do you suppose they want?” Randy asked. “I thought that they went to eastern California.”

“Gary probably came back to get his silver bullet,” Jack laughed.

Jack walked over to the top of the hill and seeing the Calvary uniform on Clarence, walked down and lowered the drawbridge.

“How steep is that grade?” Gary asked.

“I don’t have any idea Gary, why? Jack replied. “When did you get the wheel chair?”

“I’ve had it since January of 2005,” Gary replied. “It won’t climb anything over an 8° or 9° slope.”

“I think you’d better get off and let Derek push the chair up the slope, Gar-Bear,” Ron said.

“Dang it, Ron, I hate to walk,” Gary replied. “Ok. Derek, you flip those little levers right there. Be sure to push down on them.”

“Gary tells that to Derek every time he has to flip the levers,” Ron said. “Gary never remembers that he told Derek before.”

“Must be tough to get so old,” Jack said.

“Old? Whose old?” Gary asked, “I’m only 63. My birthday is tomorrow. 3/23/43. Sort of has a rhyme to it.”

“Are you here to get back your silver bullet?” Jack asked.

“Silver? They aren’t silver, they’re pure zinc. Pure zinc bullets poured in straight-sided molds, where fill-out is not so much a problem, shoot very well and act like FMJ bullets. They are VERY hard. You can use them just like jacketed bullets - no lube. And, they act like armor piercing bullets,” Gary explained. “Really jacked my jaws when they outlawed armor piercing ammo so I had some made up for my .45 Colt.”

“I never heard of that,” Jack said.

“A gun dealer told me about it back in 1982,” Gary replied. “How much further?”

“It’s only 10 more feet, Gar-Bear, do you need someone to carry you?” Clarence asked.

“No don’t go getting uppity on me Clarence, I’ll get out my KKK suit and burn it on your front lawn,” Gary said.

“Uh, you’re supposed to burn a cross, Gary,” Ron said.

“Can’t do that, Ronald, it would be sacrilegious, and I’m too darned old to risk it.” Gary laughed.

“So, why are you here?” Jack asked.

“Stopped by for coffee before we go up to Palmdale and rescue them,” Gary replied.

“They have problems in Palmdale?” Jack asked.

“Well not yet, Jack,” Ron replied, “We haven’t gotten there.”

“Please give me that wheelchair, Derek, before I run out of breath,” Gary asked topping the hill. “Anyone got a light?”

“Does he always wheeze like that?” Jack asked.

“Only when he needs another cigarette,” Ron replied.

“What’s that big hole, Jack” Clarence asked.

“We’re putting in a new shelter, Clarence.”

“Looks more like an auditorium,” Clarence observed.

“We have 32 cabins now fellas,” Jack explained.

“They all full?” Gary asked.

“No, we have 14 empty,” Jack admitted.

“They for sale?” Gary asked.

“No, that’s not how it works,” Jack replied.

“It doesn’t matter anyway, we don’t have much money left.” Gary said. “You still have some Coke Classic left, Jack?”

“Yes and Moira is putting on some coffee.”

“What no wheel chair ramp?” Gary asked.

“Get out of the chair, Gary and I’ll lift it over that 2” ledge,” Ron growled.

“I thought you said last time you were here that the 3 of you were rolling in dough,” Jack said.

“We were, but I made a bad investment,” Gary replied.

“What did you invest in” Jack asked.

“I bought a dozen of those Swiss LUWA 3 bar air circulation systems for bomb shelters and a pair of the LUWA blast doors.” Gary replied. “Then nobody wanted to build shelters because they said that nobody was going to attack the country again.”

“Could you folks help yourself to some coffee and excuse me for a few minutes?” Jack asked.

“Where is the Sweet and Low?” Ron wanted to know.

“Next to the coffeepot Ron,” Jack replied on his way out the door.

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“He here to get his bullet?” Randy asked.

“No.” Jack responded. “Could you stop the pour before you start the east wall?”

“What for?” Randy asked.

“That Olsen character has 2 LUWA blast doors and 12 LUWA 3 bar circulation systems. He said it was an investment that went south on him,” Jack explained.

“I won’t stop pouring for anyone except when God asks me in person, Jack, but do you figure you can talk him out of them?” Randy asked.

“I have the distinct impression that they don’t really want to go back to Palmdale,” Jack said.

“I’ll wait on the pour,” Randy said. “That opening we were planning on the west side will be fine for the air system opening and we’ll just have to make a minor modification. Twelve LUWA systems? Wow.”

“If you just screw in some pipes on the west end couldn’t you, and use those for the air circulators and skip building that tower of yours?” Jack asked.

“Why not?” Randy said, “I’m in a good mood because this pour is going right on schedule.”

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“Sorry that I took so long, fellas,” Jack said. “Did you get your coffee Gary?”

“Yes, thank you, Jack,” Gary replied. “Know anyone who might be interested in those filters and doors?”

“I might, what do you want for them?” Jack asked.

“The use of 10 of those 14 cabins,” Gary replied. “You can have 3 of them back in a few years when we 3 old guys and our wives die off. I need 2 cabins for my boys, Ron needs 3 for his kids and Clarence needs 2 for his boys.”

“What happened to the rest of your people?” Jack asked.

“They already went back to our housing tract in Palmdale,” Ron explained.

“Falling out?” Jack asked.

“Bunch of danged sheeple,” Gary said. “Refused to carry guns and would only fight when someone shot at them first. Objected to my wearing my Paladin rig so I switched to the Laredoan and that was worse because it had 2 guns instead of one. Jerks.”

“If we were to invite you to live here, do you have anything else to contribute to the community?” Jack asked.

“Jack, we have survival equipment running out our hind end,” Clarence said. “Generators, Geiger counters, guns, ammo, a few tons of military ordnance, communications gear and enough food for all of us for several years. We just need a place to live.”

“Do you have it all with you?” Jack asked.

“No, we need to go to Palmdale to recover some of it,” Ron replied, “But a lot of the major stuff is down in our travel trailers.”

“What would you need to move the stuff?” Jack asked.

“The loan of some trailers that would go behind our pickups and some place to park our travel trailers,” Gary replied. “I have one neighbor up there that I’d like to see move in here, but that would be up to you and him.”

“What’s his name?” Jack asked.

“Chris Peedan,” Gary replied.

“Wife’s name is Patti and they have 2 boys, Matt and Daniel?” Jack asked.

“You know him from somewhere?” Gary asked, surprised.

“They live in cabin 15,” Jack replied.

“Could we see a list of who lives here?” Gary asked.

“Here you go,” Jack said handing The Three Amigos a clipboard.

“Ronald, there’s some one here using your identity,” Gary said. “They’re in cabin 13.

“Crap. Dan and Dawn are here,” he went on. “This John Hill, is he long and lean?”

“He’s Sam Elliott, the movie star and his wife Catharine Ross,” Jack said.

“Well, I’ll be danged,” Gary said. “Look here fellas at cabin 18. Jack, is the husband a doctor?”

“Yes,” Jack replied.

Gary looked like he was getting ready to say, “Elizabeth honey, I’m coming to join you.”

“This guy in cabin 16 is a ringer,” Gary said.

“How do you mean?” Jack asked.

“Terence ‘Steve’ McQueen died of lung cancer in 1980,” Gary announced.

“I’ll look into it,” Jack replied. “Could you fellas make yourselves a pot of coffee and stay for lunch?”

“What’s cooking?” Gary asked.

“Chili,” Jack replied.

“Hot chili with pinto beans?” Ron asked.

“As a matter of fact, yes,” Jack grinned.

It was hard to tell who had the biggest grin, Ron or Gary. Clarence was rolling his eyes and Gary handed him a bottle of Pepcid. Jack took off and made the rounds of the cabins. When he talked to his fellow old time Deputies, he mentioned that Steve McQueen was a ringer that Gary identified. He also mentioned that the people in cabin 13 were possibly using a false identity. Now, you’ll recall that Ron and Gary were both 5’5. You should also recall that the guy in cabin 13 was 6’ tall, brown and brown. He was also left-handed. The ringer in cabin 16 was 6’ tall, brown and brown and right-handed.

The consensus was to allow the old geezers and their families to move in. The only objection came from the guy in cabin 13. Cabin 16 had no objection. After lunch, their travel trailers were parked on the concrete pad over the gas tanks and they took a trailer for each of their pickups and said they would return in the morning. The wives and kids stayed on and were assigned cabins. Sharon went to look up Patti and Jack, Steve, Marty and Sergeant went to confront the family in cabin 13. They actually turned out to be Ron’s neighbors from Palmdale. They had a beef with the FEMA people who tried to force them into a relocation camp and the man had killed one of the FEMA people and they fled. They came across the SUV on the road abandoned, with the motor running. They taken it, gone to the valley, picked up a trailer, looted some store for clothes to wear and had assume their neighbors name. They produced driver’s licenses or California ID cards and NIC’s proving who they were.

They were told that they could stay, but only under their true identities. Next, they approached the people in cabin 16. Everyone there had a NIC and McQueen claimed that it was only a coincidence. The children were from his wife’s first marriage, which she confirmed and so did the kids. Steve, Sergeant and Marty were convinced. Jack knew better but decided to drop the issue for the moment. He knew better because the guy had made a remark that Jack had always wondered about. (That remark was related earlier in this story.)

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Friday, March 23, 2007... Year 2, Day 153 PT... Day 518 PT...

Randy had finished the pour and was waiting for the men to return from Palmdale with the LUWA air circulators and blast doors. Sharon had baked Gary a Devil's food cake with cream cheese frosting. The people in cabin 13 had come down and apologized to Linda, explained the circumstances and what they had done. Linda told them to forget it. The quiet man was at the range practicing with his M21 at 800-yards. Jack walked up to him and watched him shoot.

"Pretty impressive for an amateur," Jack pointed out. "But you're not an amateur, are you?"

"No," the quiet man admitted.

"Why?" Jack asked.

"Why did I kill all those people, you mean?" the quiet man asked.

"It was my job, Jack, I'm a contractor," the quiet man replied.

"I guess what I really want to know was why they had to die," Jack retorted.

"They were involved with a project developing a bioweapon, the sole purpose of which was to overthrow the government of the United States," Terry McQueen replied. "The Round Table got word of the project and tasked me through the Trilateral Commission to eliminate the people. They were the only people who actually knew where the laboratory was. It was down in Hemet and has since been destroyed."

"What about that CEO and his bodyguard?" Jack asked.

"He was the man who gave me the contract and wouldn't let me retire," Terry replied. "There was one more that you probably haven't heard about. That was in Desert Center and the guy was my previous employer before I got hooked up with the Trilateral Commission. He was a nasty piece of work and I also eliminated him. He was holding the things that I needed to survive the Chinese attack."

Big John – Chapter 24 – Getting It Done

There was more to the story and Terry gave Jack enough information for Jack to believe he was being candid. He described a video he'd seen showing the tests of the bio-weapon on people. It was not a pleasant thing that he described. When he finished, he went back to his shooting and Jack went back to watch them lifting the first overhead section into place. The old geezers couldn't count too well, especially Gary. Gary had forgotten about his daughters and Sharon wasn't speaking to him. Gary and Ron had tossed a coin to see which of them would get cabin 19. There were 2 empty cabins left:

- Cabin 01: Barranca, Steve and Sandy, Jimmy and Ruth.
- Cabin 02: Wilson, Marty, Selma, Sissy and Marty.
- Cabin 03: Rowland, Howard 'Sergeant', Beth, Sandra and Billy.
- Cabin 04: Douglas, Jack, Moira, Jennifer and Joey.
- Cabin 05: Jenkins, Randy, Belinda and Randy.
- Cabin 06: Johnson, Matt, Emily, Sally, Geena and Matthew.
- Cabin 07: Cervantes, Jose, Maureen and David
- Cabin 08: Cervantes, Manny, Maria, Manuel and Maria.
- Cabin 09: Jacobs, John, Karen, Johnny and Julia.
- Cabin 10: Ralston, Bob, Camille, Robby, Glenda and Rose.
- Cabin 11: Larson, Dick, Rosemary and Tommy.
- Cabin 12: Smith, Ronnie, Joann, Karen, Joann and William.
- Cabin 13: Reynolds, James, Monica, John and Marie.
- Cabin 14: Fitzgerald, Dan, Dawn, Shannon and Michelle.
- Cabin 15: Peedan, Christopher, Patricia, Matthew and Daniel.
- Cabin 16: McQueen, Terence "Terry", Barbara, Chad, Terry and Joshua.
- Cabin 17: Elliott, Sam, Katharine and Cleo.
- Cabin 18: Olsen, Greg, Kathy, Erik, Lily and Chloe.
- Cabin 19: Green, Ron and Linda. (Ron won the toss.)
- Cabin 20: Rawlings, Clarence and Lucy.
- Cabin 21: Olsen, Gary and Sharon.
- Cabin 22: Olsen, Derek, Mary, DJ, Elizabeth and Joshua.
- Cabin 23: Olsen, Damon, Britney, Aaron and Erik.
- Cabin 24: Rawlings, Clarence Jr., Denise, Fred and Lucy.
- Cabin 25: Rawlings, James, Tamara and Clarence.
- Cabin 26: Colvin, David, Lorrie, Josh, Justin, Jason, Jesse, Jeffery.
- Cabin 27: Moon, Amy, Audrey and Udell Jr.
- Cabin 28: Adams, Mark and Paula.
- Cabin 29: Matthews, Bobby Joe, Jennifer, Bobby, Sheila and Jennifer.
- Cabin 30: Green, John, Kevin and Brenda (brothers and sister).
- Cabin 31: Empty.
- Cabin 32: Empty.

Population: 114

The Three Amigos and their families had moved in quietly and were rarely seen. You could find the 3 old geezers down at the community building every morning around 9:30am holding a 'meeting'. Except for Sundays when the meeting was at 8am. Skills were assessed for their offspring and work assignments made. Everyone pitched and worked hard except for Kevin who was rarely seen. Aside from the younger generation working for the community, they might as well never even been there. Clarence had remarked that they were getting too old to ride to the rescue anymore and there wasn't much out there left to steal, er, borrow.

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Monday, March 26, 2007... Year 2, Day 156 PT... Day 521 PT...

Randy had hauled 2 slabs a day starting on Friday. They were now setting the 7th slab into place. The 12 LUWA 3 bar air circulators were installed, as was one of blast doors. A bigger trench had been dug between the new shelter and original shelter, the wall of the original shelter was opened and a tunnel had replaced the culverts. The second blast door was used to seal the wall of the original shelter. Randy had been very busy for the last few days making changes and improvements. Jose was using the dozer and beginning to backfill the soil over the 'auditorium'. Maureen and he were now married.

Jack and Sergeant, Terry and Derek and two other pairs of men were up in Barstow with 2 tractor-trailers getting the bunk beds and 'items of interest'. They returned late in the day with the beds, 2 of the M1046A1 BGM-71E TOW 2A TOW equipped Hummers, with reloads, and enough MRE's to kill everyone in Ethiopia. They also had 1 M1097 Avenger, also with reloads. The Avenger Pedestal Mounted Stinger system is a light-weight, mobile and transportable surface-to-air missile and gun weapon system, mounted on a Hummer. The extra food had been stacked in the shelter and Matt was busy erecting the walls. There were 2 storerooms planned for the shelter, one on each end. The storeroom on the west end would hold the food and the air circulation system. Moving to the east would be a large kitchen equipped with electric appliances and in front of it, the cafeteria counter and the dining room. From that point on, there were the bathrooms and dormitories. The bathrooms would be reasonably large with one sink, stool and shower for every 11 persons, six on each side. The women's dorm would be on the south and the men's dorm on the north.

East of the dorms, plans called for a large dayroom with 2 large screen TV's plus tables and chairs. And on the east of it would be the storeroom that served as storage for non-food items, an armory and had the blast door leading to the tunnel leading to the original shelter. The communications gear was still in the original shelter but there was a spare setup, courtesy of The Three Amigos. The tunnel was larger just outside of the blast doors that opened into the new tunnel. A set of stairs ascended to the surface where there would be a second blast door made out of triple laminated $\frac{3}{4}$ " plates and counter balanced to allow easy opening.

The only problem was transporting the large 10'x60' pre-stressed slabs. They were both heavy and awkward, making them hard to handle.

Tuesday, March 27, 2007... Year 2, Day 157 PT... Day 522 PT...

Slabs 9 and 10 were coming to the mountain on Tuesday. Randy was reasonably certain that the last two overheads would go in on Friday, April 11th. If they worked over that weekend the shelter would be completely finished by April 13th.

“Jack, I’m concerned,” Randy announced. “When they brought in slab 9 today, the fellas said that they had the feeling they were being watched.”

“We can send more escorts if you’d like Randy,” Jack offered.

“Jack, that might just attract more attention,” Terry suggested. “Why don’t you let me look into it?”

“What can one man do?” Randy asked.

“Go ahead, Terry,” Jack replied. “Randy, I’m sure that Terry can handle it.”

“I’ll get my tools,” Terry said. “I may be gone a couple of days.”

“Stay in touch,” Jack advised.

“SINCGARS, channel 0 plus the time. At 4 bells,” Terry said. (0200, 0600, 1000, 1400, 1800 and 2200)

“What was that all about?” Randy asked.

“Tell your people that their backs will be covered from now on and don’t worry about it Randy,” Jack replied. “It isn’t anything that you really need to know.”

Did I forget to mention that they picked up SINCGARS at Barstow? You wouldn’t have expected them not to pick up encrypted means of communication would you? They were in the Hummers anyway and they just added some base units and antennas plus units for the pickups. Apparently Terry already had a man portable unit of his own, he’d been to Barstow before. Bells? Was Terry a former Navy man?

Wednesday, March 28, 2007... Year 2, Day 158 PT... Day 523 PT...

1000 hours...

“Cabin come in,” Jack heard on channel 1000.

“Cabin here,” Jack replied.

“FEMA, Foxtrot, Echo, Mike, Alpha,” Terry announced.

“10-4” Jack acknowledged. “Sitrep?”

“Observing construction location,” Terry replied.

“10-4” Jack answered.

1400 hours...

“Cabin come in,” Jack heard on channel 1400.

“Cabin here,” Jack replied.

“Subjects attempted to follow transport,” Terry said.

“Sitrep?” Jack asked.

“Eliminated,” Terry replied.

“10-4, clear,” Jack answered.

They had a problem. Terry returned to the compound that evening to load up on supplies and visit with the Deputies. Jack, by the way, hadn't told anyone of what he knew about Terry.

“Jack, I'm relatively certain that we haven't seen the last of these FEMA people,” Terry announced. “It may take them some time looking for their missing people and examine their records before they figure out what they were watching. That could be 2 days or 10 days.”

“I wonder what they want?” Steve asked.

“They're rounding up people and putting them in those camps they're building,” Terry said. “I estimate that they're gathering hundreds of people a day.”

“But the Chinese attack was 17 months ago,” Marty said. “Why are they all of a sudden in such a rush to round up people and protect them? They should have been doing that 15 months ago.”

“I have no idea,” Terry said. “All I can tell you is what I see.”

“Randy, if we were to double up on the transports, how long would it take for you to complete the shelter?” Jack asked.

"We have 28 slabs to go, Jack," Randy replied. "At 4 a day, we could have the slabs in place by April 4th. It would still take 2 days to finish up the shelter, so it could be ready to occupy by the 6th rather than the 13th."

"So we would gain a week?" Jack asked.

"I think that is what I just said, partner," Randy smiled.

"That also means that the slabs would be in place in a week and the shelter finished in 9 days," Jack calculated. "We need to make that happen any way we can. Terry can you get us those 9 days?"

"I can try, but I will need some help," Terry replied.

"Do you have anyone in mind?" Jack asked.

"Derek Olsen, Sam Elliott and Jose Cervantes," Terry answered. "They are good shots and Olsen is especially good. Jose and Sam are in excellent physical condition, too. We can harass them and get them running in circles for a while. They'll probably bring in the Army from LA, but not at first. Those civilians don't like to have to have the Army bail them out. I can't promise more than a week, though."

"That's enough time to move the slabs," Jack said. "We'll just have to make do."

"Another thing you ought to think about is the leftover dirt from the excavation," Terry said. "It blocks the lights from the cabins and you can't see this place from the valley anymore."

"I'll grade that dirt into a levee of sorts and leave it there, Jack," Randy suggested.

Running the dozer over the portion of the shelter that had been covered over had the added benefit of compacting the soil. Randy had brought up 2 sheepsfoot rollers and the dozers were pulling them around. Randy said the soil was cohesive soil and that they were best compacted by impact force. Apparently the soil was a mixture of silt and clay with an emphasis on the clay. The sheepsfoot roller is one of the most recognizable compaction devices and is used throughout the world. These rollers have drums with many protruding studs, each similar to a sheepsfoot, that provides a kneading action. It works on a wide range of materials but is most effective for compaction of plastic soils like clay or silt. When used on more granular materials, sheepsfoot rollers tend to shove rather than compact such soils.

Thursday, March 29, 2007... Year 2, Day 159 PT... Day 524 PT...

Randy began hauling 4 slabs a day on Thursday and brought back 2 more dozers with tamping foot rollers. He wanted the soil as compacted as they could get it and the tamping foot rollers also left the ground smooth. Terry had radioed back to Jack that they had

the FEMA people reasonably confused. It was hard, he said, for the FEMA folks to do much work when they were scrambling to avoid rifle fire. They weren't shooting anyone, but they were 'keeping their heads down'. The smaller dozer that had been used in the hole to level the soil was now being used to grade the top and sides of the levee. The pile of dirt stopped about 15' short of the ravine and was right in front of the guard towers, leaving the towers' view of the ravine unimpeded.

The Three Amigos got lawn chairs and mugs of coffee and were watching the exciting activity of installing slabs, pushing dirt and compacting the soil. It didn't seem to take too much to get them excited. Mrs. Owens was out for a while watching too so they probably didn't see much of the work during that time. Later in the day, the 3 old gents took their Super Match rifles to the range. Apparently Gary was very disappointed over something, but he'd only shoot the rifle on the 600-yard range. He kept muttering something, but Jack couldn't hear what he was saying. Later, they loaded up blanks and had a fast-draw contest. They might be old, but they weren't slow. Gary was wearing one of those Rambo III knives, Ron had a Rambo II and Clarence the First Blood. They might just be imitations, but if you used them for cutting instead of as pry bars, that really didn't matter.

"Did you speed this whole thing up, Jack?" Ron asked.

"There may be some trouble down in the valley," Jack replied. "We hope to have the shelter completed by April 6th."

"So you sent my boy down there?" Gary asked. "First it was Bush and now it's you."

"He's teamed up with Terry," Jack explained.

"That's ok then," Gary replied. "Terry borrowed my Paladin rig."

"What were you muttering about out at the range?" Jack asked.

"I missed my chance to get Geraldo," Gary replied.

The 3 old timers headed back to the community building to have some more coffee. The three largest quantities of items in their supplies inventory had been toilet paper, cigarettes and Folgers coffee, in that order.

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Monday, April 2, 2007... Year 2, Day 163 PT... Day 528 PT...

As of Sunday evening they had 28 slabs installed and the seams mortared shut. Matt was building the walls in the shelter faster than they were laying the slabs and when the slabs were put in place, going back and using a ramset to attach the walls to the ceiling. After that, his crew was adding insulation and putting on the sheets of paneling. In be-

tween times when they had nothing else to do, they were rolling on the sealer on the inside or the tar sealer on the outside. The men driving the dozers had to wait until they had the tar on the slabs before they could push more dirt. Everything was moving along very smoothly.

1400...

"Cabin come in," Jack heard on channel 1400.

"Cabin here, over," Jack replied.

"Subjects attempted to follow transport," Terry said.

"Sitrep?" Jack asked.

"Got 2, missed 2," Terry replied. "Recommend you intercept."

"10-4, clear," Jack answered.

"Lock and load," Jack announced over the PA.

Here came the 3 old farts, carrying their Super Match rifles. Gary was on foot but waddling more than walking. He wasn't wheezing so he must have just finished another cigarette.

"I'll tell you what fellas," Jack intercepted them "You guys take posts at the top of the fire road. I don't feel like carrying Gary back up the hill."

What they needed was an Apache helicopter. What they had was some Hummer's with machineguns mounted. Three of the Hummer's took off down the fire road after Jack explained what the problem was. The transport with slab number 31 arrived a minute later and the Hummer's moved to block the road. The FEMA folks were driving one of those black Suburban's. The Mk-19 opened up and blew it to hell; they must have had HEDP rounds loaded. They pushed the wrecked vehicle off the road and covered it with a pile of brush after they put the fire out. A short time later, the transport left to get another slab.

"How about we crank this operation up to 24/7?" Jack asked.

"Suits me Jack," Randy replied. "I can have the shelter covered over by sometime tomorrow. All we'll have left to do is move the dirt and finish the inside. By tomorrow night the inside will be done and it will just be finishing moving the dirt."

1800...

"Cabin to observer," Jack radioed, "Romeo Tango Bravo."

"10-4, RTB," Terry replied.

Later...

"Why did you call us back?" Terry asked.

"We advanced the operation to 24/7," Jack explained. "The shelter will be covered by tomorrow and finished by sometime on Wednesday or early Thursday. Those FEMA people made it to the bottom of the fire road before we could intercept them and I don't know if they had time to make a radio call or not."

"Maybe it's just as well, Jack," Terry said. "I estimate that about half a Division of Army moved into the valley in the last 24 hours. They're camped out down by Riverside so they won't see us moving the slabs."

"Can they see our lights?" Jack asked.

"I don't know," Terry replied.

"I'm going to impose a blackout," Jack advised. "If they can see the lights, maybe we got lucky and if they can't, it won't hurt."

"I'll pass the word," Derek announced.

Tuesday, April 3, 2007... Year 2, Day 164 PT... Day 529 PT...

It was pretty much a futile gesture, but the shelter was closed by noon and they were pushing dirt by 12:30. The levee was done so they had an extra bit of protection for the south side of the compound. Jack spent the day sitting in front of his monitors using the cameras to watch the 4 sides of the compound and the valley below. He didn't see any sign of military movement and things looked pretty normal in the valley. FEMA was still rounding up people and loading them into trucks to be taken to one of the camps. Jack concluded that there must have been more people in the valley than they had assumed. What Jack didn't see, probably because his cameras were pointed down, was the Blackhawk helicopter circling the compound at about 10,000' AMSL.

Wednesday, April 4, 2007... Year 2, Day 165 PT... Day 530 PT...

They were moving dirt as fast as they could but it would be well past dark before the shelter was covered. Everything inside the shelter had been completed and all of the bunk beds assembled. The dorms were a little cramped, but that didn't matter because it left more room for the cafeteria and the dayroom where everyone would spend most of their time. They didn't have lockers, but Matt had hung clothes bars and built shelves to hold their folded clothing. There were washers and dryers at one end of the cafeteria for people to wash and dry their clothes. An extra set of cables had been run to the orig-

inal shelter and a bank of monitors installed to allow them to watch all of the cameras from what was going to be their 'command post'. They had the original radio tower that Steve had put in and Jack's as back up. Both of the towers had been disguised to look like trees. Jack's radios were connected to one and Gary's to the other.

By 10pm, the shelter was completely covered, well ahead of schedule. Everything was done and they didn't really need to venture forth any more from the enclave/compound. Nearly everyone was at the community building watching TV or visiting. All 3 Guard Towers were now manned 24/7 because with the addition of the people from Palmdale, they had enough human resources. "Manpower" is so politically incorrect in California, these days you know. Half the power was women anyway and we all know who really runs the family, don't we? It has something to do with the hereafter.

"Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In" (1968):

Tyrone F. Horneigh: Do you believe in the hereafter?

Gladys Ormphby: Of course I do.

Tyrone F. Horneigh: Well... then, you know what I'm here after!

Gladys Ormphby: I tried to join the Sexual Revolution, but I flunked the physical.

Ruth Buzzi played Gladys Ormphby and Arte Johnson played Tyrone F. Horneigh. Buzzi was one of only four people to appear in EVERY episode of the show. Both of them did voices in many animated shows like Smurfs.

The Three Amigos were huddled over in one corner. Their lips were moving but their arms weren't so they couldn't be Mediterranean. The 4 Deputies were over in another corner with Terry at the table talking about what he'd seen in the valley.

"They aren't really mistreating the people," Terry said, "But they aren't free to come and go."

"Are we?" Marty asked. "If we leave this compound, I have a feeling that we'll end up in one of those camps."

"There hasn't been anything about this on National Public Radio, you know," Steve added.

"There really hasn't been anything on the radio since they started broadcasting except for a few announcements from the White House and the weather," Jack agreed. "Did you hear about the temperatures in the Arctic?"

"What about them?" Sergeant asked.

"The European Union has been worried for some time a loss of the ozone layer over the Arctic," Jack explained. "I first heard about it early in 2005, but forgot all about it. There

seemed to be some concern that the Arctic was moving into Antarctic-like conditions which would result in an increase in UV radiation levels that would have consequences on human health in northern hemisphere countries.”

“We have a lot more to worry about than the weather,” Marty insisted. “Besides, who was it that claimed that these catastrophes always occurred in threes?”

You could have heard a pin drop. (It was me; none of them.)

“If that’s the case, then we’re due for more,” Jack finally responded. “We had those dirty bombs, the tsunami and earthquakes and then World War Three. After that, we were attacked on the road that time plus that big attack where the guys from Palmdale had to bail us out. That makes five, so we’re due for one more.”

“That’s not the way it works, Jack,” Terry said. “One more will make 2 groups of three. Under the threes theory, you have to have three groups of three to make it come out even. So, that means that we’re in for 4 more, not 1. If you believe in that sort of stuff.”

“Maybe that little attack on Riverside didn’t count,” Steve suggested.

“Oh great,” Marty said, “That means we have 5 to go.

“Maybe the war and the aftermath all count as one,” Jack said hopefully.

“If that’s the case then there’s no limit on how many things could happen to us and all count as one event,” Sergeant chuckled.

“There is only one weak spot in the entire defense,” Terry said.

“What’s that Terry?” Jack asked.

“The road into the compound,” Terry replied. “You built a drawbridge, but you didn’t make it redundant. What if someone gets the drawbridge down?”

“Any suggestions?” Jack asked. “The Claymores are angled to protect the road in front of the gate. And, we have TOW missiles, AT-4’s, LAW rockets and the M3 MAAWS.”

“I’d love to have some AT mines, but all of the old dumb AT mines have been discontinued because they were outdated,” Terry replied. “I guess you’ll just have to make do with what you have.”

Of The Three Amigos, only Gary was hard of hearing. Ron and Clarence could overhear bits and pieces of the conversation so Ron got up and walked over to the table where the Deputies and Terry were sitting.

“You fellas have a problem?” Ron asked.

“We were talking about anti-tank mines, Ron, do you have any?” Jack asked.

“No we don’t,” Ron replied.

“I guess you can’t help then,” Jack said, “Thanks for asking.”

“Would several hundred pounds of C-4 in 1¼ pound blocks do you any good?” Ron asked.

“Only if you had detonators and fuse,” Terry said.

“Do you want fuse and caps or electrical detonators?” Ron asked. “What we have are those Marine Corp M183 Demolition Kits. But, we have some dynamite with fuses and caps or electrical detonators if you’d rather have those.”

FYI: The Charge, Assembly Demolition M183 Comp C-4 (DODIC M757) is used by assault demolition teams in general demolition operations such as reduction of small obstacles, cutting, breaching, and cratering. It is also effective against obstacles such as small dragon’s teeth approximately 3-feet high and 3-feet wide at the base. The M183 Charge Assembly consists of 16 M112 Demolition Blocks and 4 M15 Priming Assemblies. Each M112 block is composed of 1-¼ pounds of Composition C-4. The M15 Priming Assembly is a 5-foot length of detonating cord with two plastic M1 Clips and 2 RDX boosters attached. The boosters, which are about ¼” in diameter and 2-inches in length contain approximately 13.5 grains of RDX. The priming assembly has two M1 Detonating Cord Clips for fixing the M183 Charge to the main line.

The Three Amigos also had several cases of dynamite (Tovex), blasting caps with fuses and electrical detonators. Anything the enclave needed for defense was readily available; it was all stored in their spare bedrooms at home. The stuff was perfectly safe, or so Ron insisted. They’d been to Barstow before anyone else and had cleaned out the M183 demolition assemblies. The dynamite had come from an explosives dealer in the Antelope Valley.

“Ron, I’m really grateful,” Jack said. “We’ll take everything you have, right fellas?”

“Ok, there are about 6 pickup loads spread among our homes,” Ron replied, “I’m glad we could help.”

“Is it just me, or did we just avoid another catastrophe?” Marty asked.

“What did they want, Ron?” Gary asked.

“Some explosives,” Ron replied.

“You didn’t give them all of our explosives did you?” Gary asked.

“I only told them about the stuff in the spare bedrooms,” Ron replied. “We still have all of the grenades and explosives under our beds in the main bedrooms.”

Big John – Chapter 25 – Movement

Thursday, April 5, 2007... Year 2, Day 166 PT... Day 531 PT...

Jack wasn't anybody's fool, so he figured that The Three Amigos had some more explosives stashed somewhere, but the community now had most of them. While Terry and the others planted 2.5-pound blocks of C-4 at strategic locations in the road and set them up for remote electrical detonation, he reviewed the security precautions one last time. It was then that he realized that the wall behind those big propane tanks created a blind spot. He had 2 cameras left but only 5 additional monitors, one for Steve's house, one for Marty's, and one for Sergeant's. He'd already taken Randy's monitors for the command center and he decided to save one of the cameras for a spare and distribute the 5 monitors to the 5 locations where monitors remained. Jack got Bob to help him and they mounted the camera in a tree where they could view the area behind the wall and further on. They used the trencher to dig a shallow trench, maybe 1' deep, and ran it to the original shelter.

From there, they snaked the cable through the conduits that ran to the homes and held the other TV cables. They hooked up the new monitor in the command center and it worked, so they connected the other cable to a line amplifier, snaked the lines and went to the homes and hooked up the additional monitors. Each location now had a monitor for the valley camera, monitors for the 3 north facing cameras, a monitor for the draw-bridge and a monitor for the new camera. They added the black raised tape labels to the new monitors and reviewed the security yet another time. All was well with the camera coverage and they went to see how Terry and the others were doing with their preparations. The small blocks of C-4 had been buried about a foot deep and the ground carefully compacted over the charges. All of the leads ran to the side of the road and were in a 1' deep trench that Randy had cut with the trencher.

Jack and Bob extended the trench to the hole that they dug to access the old shelter and began to pull the labeled wires to the hole. Jose followed behind filling the trench and compacting the soil. They fished the wires into the pipe into the shelter and ran them to the command center. Ron had produced a blasting machine capable of handling ten circuits. The machine produced the necessary 450-volt charge and had separate manual switches for each of the 10 circuits. They left the wires shunted by the machine for Terry to connect when he was done. Terry had planted 6 2.5-pound charges just far enough apart that any one of them wouldn't detonate the charges on either side, 6 charges in total. When he finished, he went to the old shelter and connected the wires. The reason for the detonator cord was that you are cautioned not to place blasting or detonator caps beneath the ground. The detonator cord actually initiated the C-4.

Friday, April 6, 2007... Year 2, Day 167 PT... Day 532 PT...

The geezers finally moved the things from under their beds and put them in the closets of the spare bedrooms. No one had asked them if flatulence would detonate explosives, but Ron and Gary ate lots of chili with beans and knew from first-hand experience that it

was nothing to worry about. Clarence liked chili too but it didn't like him. What they couldn't figure out was why Jack and the others took all of their explosives and only used part of one M183 and some detonators from a second. Maybe they'd raised the price of admission to the compound? Ron had overheard bits and pieces of the bit about the Arctic and was telling Gary and Clarence that a new Ice Age was on the way. The high point of their day came when Kathy Ireland walked her dog.

It was just like the military in a way, hurry up and wait. Waiting was good; it meant that you weren't fighting to preserve whatever you had that 'they' wanted. One nice thing about that fire road was that it simply wasn't that wide. It didn't have to be, it was only intended for fire trucks. The drawbridge had gone in at the narrow spot and that made it even better. There was no way around that drawbridge, but maybe a careful man or woman could risk the razor wire and get across the gully and up on the uphill side. Then, he or she would have to jimmy the locking electrical switches to turn on the power to the winches, release the locks and lower the bridge. It could be done, but it wouldn't be easy. Or, they could just cut those cables letting the bridge fall. Maybe that wasn't such a good idea however; it might just break that bridge into pieces.

Napoleon recognized the importance of logistics with his statement that an Army travels on its stomach. When all you had was muskets and lances that might have been true. But, this was the 21st Century and the Army had all of those whiz-bang technical things. With fewer weapons to employ, intelligence was the name of the game. That was true if you were ½ of a Division in Riverside or less than 100 able fighters up on a mountain overlooking the Inland Empire. Terry's intelligence on those 2 Regiments of soldiers was very incomplete. He returned to the mountain before he learned that they were simply regrouping and moving on. In the hurried up 24/7 approach to finishing the shelter, no one had noticed that they were gone. They were waiting for an attack from the Army that would never come.

The Blackhawk helicopter noted the progress on the shelter and it was duly reported up the chain of command. Somewhere along the way an officer didn't deem it important and that's where that bit of information languished. Who really cared if a group of people had gotten together and formed a group to protect themselves? It was happening all over the country. FEMA hadn't found their 2 people yet and had given up looking. The 4 men in the group keeping an eye on the construction activities hadn't left any notes. The notes were in a little notebook in the pocket of a dead man in a blown up Suburban covered with brush. But, no one knew that.

o

Washington, DC...

In the days, weeks and months that had followed the attack by the Chinese there had been an unsuccessful attempt at a palace coup. Bush decided not to alarm the American people and the event was hushed up. Apparently he believed that the knowledge would do more harm than good. The US wasn't in any particular danger of attack from

other nations because despite the fact that the country was in ruins, much of the military was intact, especially the entire Navy. The Canadians and Mexicans, to avoid an overwhelming flow of refugees, closed the Canadian and Mexican borders. They weren't being unfriendly but they had limited resources. And with the EU and the Russians going head to head, the United Kingdom couldn't afford to lower its security enough to reach out.

A lot had been accomplished since the attack 533 days before. Most of the rubble and ruin had been cleared away, bodies buried and some small amount of reconstruction was going on. California was the breadbasket of the country in some ways because it supplied a fair portion of the fruits and vegetables found in grocery stores. The Midwest was also a breadbasket, producing the crops and the livestock that fed much of the nation. As did the Southeastern states. California had taken a triple whammy and wasn't bouncing back as fast as the remaining states. And much of the infrastructure needed to be rebuilt including railroads and highways.

The FEMA camps were an entirely different story. Originally intended to provide shelter and food for the people, in states like California and a few others, the damage to the infrastructure was great. Most of Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco, for example were gone. The northeastern cities suffered the same fate, as did cities like Chicago and Denver. In some of the more rural states, there was barely even a FEMA presence. Where there were camps, the government had gotten heavy handed and rather than allowing people who were able to fend for themselves alone, had elected to collect and encamp everyone. It probably started out as a good idea, it usually does. Scarce resources and limited transportation systems can lead to two-dimensional thinking. From their perch up on the mountain Jack and the others could see the product of that two-dimensional thinking.

◦

Monday, April 9, 2007... Year 2, Day 170 PT... Day 535 PT...

"Terry, I can't tell from here what's going on down there," Jack explained. "How about you round up your group and go get us some current intelligence? We can't sit here on a high state of alert waiting for the shoe to drop. If we do, we could lose our edge."

"Ok Jack," Terry replied, "We use the same system as before. Give us a day or two to poke around and I'll see what we can come up with."

Terry gathered his team and they were gone, heading first to Riverside to check on the Army Regiments.

1400...

"Cabin come in," Jack heard on channel 1400.

"Cabin here," Jack replied.

"Uniform Sierra Alpha negative," Terry said. (US Army is gone.)

"Sitrep?" Jack asked.

"Unclear," Terry replied. "Recommendation?"

"Check on Foxtrot Echo Mike Alpha," Jack suggested.

"10-4, clear," Terry answered.

1800...

"Cabin come in," Jack heard on channel 1800.

"Cabin here," Jack replied.

"Subjects massing large force of black suits in Sierra Bravo," Terry radioed.

"Numbers?" Jack asked.

"2 companies plus," Terry replied.

"10-4 Romeo Tango Bravo," Jack instructed.

"10-4, RTB," Terry replied and cut off his radio.

"Executive Committee to the community building," Jack announced over the PA.

"What's up Jack?" Steve asked.

"Like I told you earlier, the Army is gone and I sent Terry to check on FEMA," Jack answered. "He just called and they have an assault force of more than 400 people in San Bernardino."

"Do you think that they're headed here?" Sergeant asked.

"I told Terry to return to base," Jack replied. "I don't want people outside of the compound if they do. But, to answer the question directly, where else would they be going?"

"If Terry's here, how can we find out?" Marty asked.

"I have one more camera, plus a MFJ micro ATV transmitter and a UHF amplifier I picked up somewhere. Bob, could you rig up a battery operated remote TV feed using my one remaining camera?" Jack asked.

"I could, yes," Bob replied. "And we can use a TV to view the picture. What do you have in mind?"

"We can plant a camera to monitor the junction of I-15 and Lytle Creek Canyon road," Jack suggested. "We'll plant it high and zoom it in on the area."

"Get the equipment and give me half an hour to configure it," Bob responded.

"Steve, I'm going to need a pair of those 12-volt deep cycle batteries wired in parallel with a full charge for the amplifier," Jack indicated. "Plus, were going to have to wire up a 9 volt long-term power source."

"I can bridge that off one of the 12-volt batteries," Bob suggested.

"I'll get the equipment," Jack replied.

Thirty minutes later, the camera was mounted on a pipe, which was screwed into a pipe flange, in turn secured to the bottom of a wooden box. The transmitter was small and the amplifier much larger. They had a 3-element beam antenna on a 10' pole with 15' of cable and two batteries, plus a bridge to break out 9 volts for the transmitter. The box was large enough to hold everything. Jack and Steve headed to a location overlooking the junction and hooked everything up. Jack radioed Bob and Bob told him he had a good picture of the junction. The batteries held the box firmly in place and it was good for several days of continuous feed. They returned to the compound to watch the new TV show. Sometimes technology came in handy.

o

Tuesday, April 10, 2007... Year 2, Day 171 PT... Day 536 PT...

They were now staffing the command center 24/7 in addition to the Guard Towers. They were keeping an eye on the Lytle Creek Road junction with I-15 all of the time. Terry and the guys pulled in around the same time that they returned from setting the remote ATV camera. Terry told them that it appeared that FEMA was getting ready to mount an operation. The first FEMA vehicles came through the I-15 junction and onto Lytle Creek Road just after 10am. The compound went on full alert and they moved an Mk-19 armed Hummer to the top of the hill overlooking the drawbridge.

The FEMA vehicles didn't attempt to access the compound by the fire road so they pulled the Hummer back and dispersed the people to repel an attack from the north. The FEMA people had fanned out in an arc surround the compound on 3 sides: west, north and a few to the east. They started to move in around 11am and then stopped when they saw the signs for the minefield. One of them must have decided it was a bluff. He started moving forward slowly through the grass and weeds and managed to

avoid all of the M14's. He was 50-yards in and his companions were cheering him on in a quiet way. That quiet was shattered when he tripped an M-16 mine.

The other FEMA people pulled back. Just after noon, a few people on foot came up the fire road and one of the brave souls worked his way past the razor wire and lowered the drawbridge once he figured out and picked the key locks. Jack armed the blasting machine and focused the bridge camera and the east tower camera on the front gate area. FEMA brought in a Bradley Fighting Vehicle to assault the compound. Jack took it out with the first of the 6 C-4 charges. Men poured up the road and spread out to assault the compound from the east end. When enough of them were in range, they detonated the M-18A1 Claymore mines from the safety of the command center taking out about 70-80 black shirts. FEMA retired to Lytle Creek Road. It seemed obvious that FEMA couldn't get in, but on the other hand, they couldn't get out. Late in the afternoon, FEMA tried Plan B; they brought in a pair of gunships. The Stinger missiles were very effective.

Wednesday, April 11, 2007... Year 2, Day 172 PT... Day 537 PT...

"I don't know whether to view this as a Mexican standoff or a siege," Jack remarked. "Either way, it amounts to the same thing. We're prisoners in our own homes. Terry went down and raised the drawbridge during the middle of the night and disabled the winches."

"How did you do that, Terry?" Marty asked.

"I pulled the batteries," Terry replied. "I put them in holes about 10' away and covered them with plastic plus soil and rock. They're under the Pepsi cans."

"I'm surprised that they didn't have a sniper," Sergeant said.

"They had 2," Terry replied, "But I'm sure they can find others."

"You seem to be most enterprising Terry," Sergeant said, "For such a quiet man."

"A million years ago I was a Navy SEAL," Terry replied.

"What did you do after that?" Sergeant said.

"Like I told you when I moved in, I was a contractor," Terry replied.

"We're going to have to find some way to turn this situation around," Jack interrupted.

"Two special forces and a tank jockey don't make for a very big force," Steve said.

"Ronnie and I were both MP's," Jack said. "That makes 5."

"You'd better plan on Marty and me," Sergeant added. "That makes 7."

"We'd better plan on including Randy," Jack added. "Probably Jose and Manny too. That makes ten."

"Many more than that will be too many, Jack," Terry said, "But we need a diversion."

"Put those batteries back in the drawbridge and give me a key," Gary said. "The 10th Calvary will provide the diversion. We'll have them rolling in the aisles. Ronald, let's go load up the zinc cartridges."

Thursday, April 12, 2007... Year 2, Day 173 PT... Day 538 PT...

0200...

Gary, Ron and Clarence rounded the corner and started down the hill. They all had Colts strapped on and were arguing very loudly.

"Darn it Gary, all the bars are closed," Ron shouted.

"Then I'll find a liquor store," Gary retorted.

"But, Gary," Clarence protested, you're in a wheelchair."

"It's got a 20 mile range and I brought the charger," Gary responded.

They stopped and lowered the drawbridge. Ron and Clarence were just standing there and Gary parked his chair, unhooked the locks, inserted the keys and pushed the buttons. When the drawbridge was down, Gary took off with his wheelchair in medium crossing the bridge and continuing down the fire road. Ron and Clarence caught up with him.

"Anyway, butthead, you always said that if I wanted a drink, you'd drive me the bar and buy me the first one," Gary shouted at Ron. "So get to humping, partner, we're finding a bar."

The FEMA folks were focused on the old geezers and didn't notice the 10 men at the top of the hill.

"You never listen to me, you chump," Ron said. "First you went chasing bimbo number one and ended up with bimbo number two. I tried to tell you about that broad."

"You had your fun," Gary said, "I wanted to have mine."

"Was it any fun, Gar-Bear?" Ron asked.

“No but that’s beside the point,” Gary replied. “You don’t need to come along Clarence, you never promised to buy me a drink.”

“I’m just looking out for Ron, Gary,” Clarence replied.

“Where do you 3 men think you are going?” one of the FEMA guys asked.

“I’m going to get a drink and he’s going along to buy and he’s going along to watch him,” Gary answered. “What business is it of yours? And what are you all dressed up for, Halloween?”

“We’re with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and we’re gathering people for the camps,” the agent explained.

“What camps?” Gary asked.

“The emergency relocation camps that were established after the war,” the agent replied.

“What war?” Gary asked. “Nobody told me about no darned war. The next thing you know Bush will be putting my son on active duty to go fight in Iran or North Korea.”

“The Chinese attacked the United States with nuclear weapons on October 21st, 2005,” The FEMA man explained.

“Is that what all the lights and noise were?” Gary asked. “Anyone get hurt?”

“200 million people ended up dying,” the FEMA man said.

“Well, good,” Gary replied, “The bars won’t be so crowded.”

“There aren’t any bars anymore,” the FEMA man said.

“Why not?” Gary asked, “Bush get all of those Christians worked up and they readopt Prohibition?”

“The bars are all closed because of the war,” the FEMA man said.

“You’re going to have to speak up there, fella, I’m deaf in my right ear,” Gary said.

“He said the bars are closed because of the war,” Ron repeated, loudly.

“What war?” Gary asked.

“Who’s on first?” Clarence asked.

“The war with the Chinese, Gar-Bear,” Ron shouted.

Gary noticed Derek wave and he knew it was time to call it off; the 10 men were in the clear.

“Well, I think I’d better go back home and make some tea,” Gary said. “We have to support the Chinese or Wal-Mart will go broke.”

“You men are going to have to come with us,” the FEMA man said.

“Why? I don’t feel like a drink anymore,” Gary replied. “And I couldn’t have been speeding, my wheelchair was only on medium.”

The majority of the FEMA assault squad had returned to San Bernardino and there were 10 men at the bottom of the hill. They had another M3 Bradley Calvary Fighting Vehicle (CFV) and were covering the fire road with its 25mm Bushmaster gun, 7.62, coaxial machinegun and twin tubed TOW missile launcher. None of the men were in the CFV.

“We’ll take you to the camp, old man,” the FEMA man explained.

“You just going to stand there and let them haul us off, Ronald McDonald?” Gary snapped. “Aw to hell with it, I’ll handle this myself.”

Gary stood up and held his right hand over his belly button. It was just inches from his nickel-plated 4½” Ruger Vaquero.

“Ok, asshole,” Gary said, “Draw.”

Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt, Pfutt.

“You lose, asshole,” Gary said. “Let’s got back to the community building you two, I’m buying the coffee.”

“But, Gary, the coffee is free,” Clarence said.

“That’s why I’m buying, Clarence,” Gary laughed.

◦

Derek had moved the Bradley CFV to the top of the hill to protect the drawbridge before they set off to discourage the FEMA people. Some of the residents used the crane to move the seriously battered Bradley IFV and they recovered what ammo they could from the vehicle and added it to the stores of the CFV. Ron’s son John played with the CFV until he could figure out how to make everything work and then showed Brenda

and a couple of others how to run the vehicle and its weapon systems. No one was going to come up that road again unless the residents invited them.

"I wonder how long they'll be gone." Gary asked.

"Until they get them to back off or they run out of people to shoot, I suppose," Ron replied.

"I'm just happy they were able to equip all the rifles with suppressors," Clarence added. "They are going to give them back aren't they?"

"If they don't, challenge them to draw, Clarence," Gary laughed. "It works for me."

"Is it cold in here, or is it just me?" Ron asked.

"It's the middle of April, but it's also the mountains, Ron, I don't really know," Gary replied.

"Put another log on the fire, Ron," Clarence suggested. "What was it they were talking about with the Arctic?"

"That it was cold up there," Gary said. "I sometimes catch a word or two out of my left ear."

"You do?" Ron said, "I thought you began all sentences with huh?"

"I hear what people say sometimes, it's just that my brain refuses to process the sound," Gary explained. "But, when they repeat themselves, I catch every change between what they said the first time and what they said the second time. Why is it when you ask someone to repeat what they said, they have to reword it?"

"Huh?" Ron asked.

o

Tuesday, April 17, 2007... Year 2, Day 178 PT... Day 543 PT...

The ten men returned towards evening of the sixth day. While they had been out 'hunting', Jack had additional conversations with Terry about the earlier killings. Jack was especially interested in that gun storeowner in Running Springs. Terry told him that he had objected to that killing but the CEO had insisted. That coupled with the fact that the CEO insisted he continue working after he'd eliminated the last member of the bio-weapon project group had caused him to eliminate the CEO and his bodyguard. He said that he had insisted that the man probably wouldn't recognize him and in fact, when he'd shown up to carry out the assignment, the man didn't. Jack had to think about that one. There wasn't a justice system anymore and no courts or prisons. Jack had finally

decided that what Terry had done to help the community outweighed a past crime. If vengeance was called for, let God dish it out. They were trying to survive and Terry was helping them accomplish that very thing.

The men declined to talk about what they had done in the valley. However, they said, the camps were now open and people were free to come and go as they chose. They also mentioned that it had been unseasonably cold in the valley. Maybe a storm front was coming though?

“It has been cold up here too,” Gary said. “Even Ron was complaining and he never complains about the cold. They didn’t say anything on NPR about any storm front, though.”

“I just thought that might explain the cold weather,” Jack said.

“What was that business a while back when you fellas were talking about the weather?” Gary asked.

“There seemed to be some concern that the Arctic was moving into Antarctic-like conditions which would result in an increase in UV radiation levels that would have consequences on human health in northern hemisphere countries.” Jack repeated.

“Well, I don’t get out much so the sun won’t bother me,” Gary replied. “We misunderstood and thought that you were talking about another ice age.”

“If the cold spread, I suppose that could happen,” Jack suggested. “That was quite an act the three of you put on out there a few nights ago.”

“Who was acting besides me?” Gary asked. “I just made out like I was going off the wagon and let it all happen naturally.”

“What about facing that guy down with your Colt?” Jack asked.

“That was the only time that I wasn’t acting,” Gary smiled.

Big John – Chapter 26 – Brrrrrr...

Washington, DC...

“Mr. President, we have a problem,” the Secretary of Commerce announced.

“Of course we have a problem Secretary Gutierrez,” Bush replied, “We’ve had the crap kicked out of us.”

“Our people at NOAA tell me that the polar operational environmental satellites (POES) operated by the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service (NESDIS) are confirming some of those stories being put out by the European Union about the ozone problem in the Arctic,” Gutierrez responded, ignoring Bush’s attempt at humor.

“So the Swedes and the Norwegians get a little extra snow and a better sun tan, how does that relate to the US and our problems?” Bush asked.

“In the year 2000, a study of the atmosphere over the Arctic area near the North Pole shows extreme thinning of the ozone that protects Earth against harmful radiation. The study found ozone losses of more than sixty percent eighteen kilometers above the Arctic, Mr. President,” Gutierrez explained. “In January 2005, Dr. Neil Harris of the European Ozone Research Coordinating Unit in Britain reported that, *The meteorological conditions we are now witnessing resemble and even surpass the conditions of the 1999-2000 winter – when the worst ozone loss to date was observed.* These latest readings show that the problem is expanding and this coming winter will be the worst one on record. The hole in the ozone layer could affect areas around the polar zone, Scandinavia and even down to central Europe, which means that Alaska is going to get hit hard.”

“What about the rest of the country?” Bush asked.

“There will be an overall cooling of the country and a severe winter,” Gutierrez replied.

“I guess you’d better get the word out on NPR and have them give the public an overview of what to expect,” the President directed.

“Yes Sir, I’ll get right on it,” Gutierrez replied.

◦

On 30 October 1938, Orson Wells directed the Mercury Theatre On the Air in a dramatization of “War of the Worlds”, based on H. G. Wells’ novel. Setting the events in then-contemporary locations (The “landing spot” for the Martian invasion, Grover’s Mill, New Jersey, was chosen at random with a New Jersey road map) and dramatizing it in the style of a musical program interrupted by news bulletins, complete with eye-witness accounts, it caused a nationwide panic, with many listeners fully convinced that the Earth

was being invaded by Mars. Don't underestimate the power of the radio to move people when they no longer have TV. And, don't underestimate the power of people to read things into the news that hasn't been reported.

Tuesday, April 24, 2007... Year 2, Day 185 PT... Day 550 PT...

"See, what did I tell you," Clarence said turning off the radio. "We're entering a new ice age."

"Jack did say that, 'If the cold spread, he supposed that could happen,'" Gary agreed.

"When did you talk to Jack about this?" Ron asked.

"About a week ago, Ron," Gary replied. "I mentioned that we'd overheard part of their conversation and he told me that there was some concern that the Arctic was moving into Antarctic-like conditions and it could cause sunburns."

"Well, don't just sit there, go tell Jack what you heard on the radio," Ron said.

Why is it when someone is asked to repeat something they heard, they have to reword it? And why do they generally add a little to what they heard in the form of their interpretations of what they heard? It's bad enough when you're a kid sitting in a circle playing Telephone where you whisper what you heard from the kid on one side to the kid on the other side. But grownups often tend to report the report rather than giving the report and we ALL know what reporters are like. 600 yards...

[Dan Rather had proof about Bush's Air National Guard Service back in 2004, right? Does anyone even remember Peter Arnett? Peter Arnett, the veteran former CNN correspondent covering his second Gulf war, had been fired by NBC, MSNBC and National Geographic on March 31, 2003 after granting an interview on Iraqi TV during which he claimed the US war plan had "failed" and said media reports of Iraqi casualties were helping a growing anti-war movement in America. The Daily Mirror picked him up so he could keep reporting 'the truth'. All of them had teeth marks on their ankles from putting their foot in their mouths by over reporting the news. How did old Wolf Blitzer manage to stay around? He took advice from Teddy Kennedy, perhaps? Draw me another map, Geraldo only this time show our side where the enemy is. Or, is the enemy a protected source? It's ok, Geraldo, according to CNN, the kids in the US didn't think much of the 1st Amendment anyway.]

In his State of the Union message of Wednesday, February 2, 2005, Bush had mentioned the intelligence overhaul bill aimed at strengthening the requirements for visa applications and establishing a passport security program within the State Department. The bill also required the Department of Homeland Security to develop a way to use biometric data to track people entering and leaving the United States. It became the basis for the NIC's. Remember them? The only thing was, the Administration had started developing the NIC system in 2002, shortly after 9/11. When the intelligence overhaul bill

was passed, the system was ready to go. Its databanks were loaded with the information of all the citizens of the US and the system was ready to accept the biometric data on US citizens when authorized by Congress. The tsunami and later World War III had overtaken the plans of the government. The whole upside of the NIC's had turned out to be that it made identifying the bodies of the sheeple easier.

Not everyone was in the camps, either, before the 10 men had adjusted FEMA's attitude. On this day, two families with children showed up at the drawbridge. They had well-constructed basement bomb shelters and food for a year. A little resource reallocation had allowed them to last well beyond their initial one-year food supplies. The two families had observed the movement of the slabs and had only been able to follow them to the Lytle Creek Road exit. It had taken them the better part of two weeks to find the fire road and drawbridge.

After screening the families in the usual manner, Jack asked Terry to make a run to the valley and check on their stories. This could just be another attempt by FEMA to gain access to the enclave. Meanwhile the families were given provisional admittance to the compound, filling the last two cabins.

Cabin 31: Pelham, Robert, Loretta, Christopher and Shaun.

Cabin 32: Hewlett, John, Lynn, Susan and Rachael.

Total Population: 122 and some babies on the way. Belinda was pregnant and Maureen and Maria Cervantes were both late.

◦

Thursday, April 26, 2007... Year 2, Day 187 PT... Day 552 PT...

"Their stories check out just fine, Jack," Terry told him.

"Good, I'll tell them that they're permanent residents and see to getting them anything they need," Jack replied.

"They don't need weapons and such?" Terry asked.

"They were friends and a couple of genuine survivalists," Jack explained. "They refused to get NIC's and they had one M1A rifle and 3 M16A3 rifles per family. They also had M1911's for each member of the family plus a shotgun, a .22 rifle and ample ammunition for all of the weapons. I figured that they'd check out ok, but we had to be sure. They just plain ran out of food and with FEMA covering the valley as closely as they were, they had trouble getting any more."

"I suppose that California law gives some people a shopping list for what they want in firearms doesn't it?" Terry chuckled.

“What was the weather like down below?” Jack asked.

“Pretty cold for late April,” Terry replied.

“After you left, The Three Amigos came with some tale about NPR announcing that we might be entering a new ice age,” Jack said. “I questioned them and it appears that what’s really going on is that next winter will be unusually severe. It has to do with the Arctic ozone thing I told you guys about. We’ll have to try and maximize our garden output this year.”

They rototilled in some of their manure pile and planted the garden rows 27” apart except for the crops like potatoes and melons. That gave them an extra row every 9th row and the first 63 rows became 70. The rest of the manure pile was pushed over the edge of the ravine. It took them a couple of weeks to get the garden ready and the crops planted.

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Friday, May 11, 2007... Year 2, Day 202 PT... Day 567 PT...

“Looking good there Jack,” Clarence said, “Did you plant some watermelon?”

“Clarence, we have watermelon, chicken, baby back ribs and beef ribs,” Jack replied.

“What, no chitterlings?” Clarence asked.

“We used the casings to make sausage, Clarence,” Jack explained.

“Well good, I don’t see how folks can eat that stuff anyway,” Clarence laughed.

It was a little cool for the 11th of May, but not when compared to a normal day in the northern parts of the country. Below them in the Inland Empire, people were busy planting their gardens too. The FEMA folks had collected sizable amounts of staples to feed the camps and those were divided among a couple of grocery stores and people were able to shop for groceries. Lacking anything better than US greenbacks, that was what they used as a medium of exchange. The stores also kept ‘tabs’, much in the manner of frontier America. The stores were a cooperative venture and anyone was free to work in a store to work off his or her family’s ‘tab’. Other stores opened and life began to develop a sense of normalcy. Well, as normal as life could get after terrorist attacks, a tsunami and WW III.

Some suggest that in the days following a collapsed economy and a series of natural and/or man-made disasters America would fall apart at the seams. Maybe they were right, but there didn’t seem to be any evidence of that in southern California in the early summer of 2007. There wasn’t any Sacramento to ram a bunch of ridiculous laws down their throats and the people adjusted to their present situation just as they always had in

the 232-year history of the country. In fact, there seemed to be a new set of laws that made a lot more sense. An armed society is a polite/safe society; why punish the masses for the failings of a few? There were 2 categories of crimes, those that resulted in banishment and those that were more permanent in the punishment. Those few executions were very public affairs.

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Wednesday, July 4, 2007... Year 2, Day 256 PT... Day 621 PT...

Independence Day is supposed to be a hot day, even in the mountains. It wasn't in 2007, barely reaching the mid 70's. They didn't have any fireworks either; most of them had come from China. Roads around the country were being repaired and opening up but a fuel crunch kept most people from traveling. The little community now had a name; they had voted to call it Liberty Village. They used pig wire, barbed wire and standard fence posts and the minefield was now fenced in and the signs were in all languages and said 'Mines', not 'Park'. Jack and Steve had done that for 2 reasons, the first of which had been seeing reason and the second of which had been that they couldn't remove the mines because no one really knew where they were.

"So tell me, Gary," Jack inquired, "How did you end up in a wheelchair?"

"I was sitting there in December of 2004 minding my own business when the phone rang," Gary replied. "It was some gal with the medical equipment place where I got all of my medical equipment like my CPAP, oxygen machine and nebulizer. She was inquiring how everything was going and the subject of mobility problems came up. She wanted to know did I use a wheelchair and I told her I couldn't afford it. She asked if I had a cane, which I did and a walker, which I did and then she told me that I might be able to get a wheelchair for free. They called a while later and asked me a few questions and said I qualified and that since I had a hardship financial qualification, the wheelchair would be free. By the end of January 2005, I had it. The doctor wouldn't go along until I explained that I didn't have a driver's license and could use the chair to go see Ronald."

"I don't see you using it much," Jack observed.

"Doctor told me if I got to depending on it that my health would go to hell," Gary replied. "Started out using it as a fancy office chair at my computer until the weather warmed up and then I used it to walk the dog. I could only make it about 1/2 way around the housing tract before I got wore out. So, I started walking her and riding the wheelchair. But inside the house I didn't use it. Didn't want to get any blood clots in my legs."

"You seem to be doing well for a man of 64," Jack said.

"I can't die until Sharon can get Social Security," Gary laughed. "Sure would be nice if they'd ever get the banks' computers up, I must have a jillion dollars in the bank."

“What makes you think the government is still paying Social Security?” Marty asked.

“Bush still alive?” Gary asked.

“Yes, why?” Marty replied.

“Cause you’d know if they weren’t,” Gary replied, “I’d have killed me another President. Terry, you look like a real gun for hire in that Paladin rig. Do you want the other holster and gun I had made up to go with it?”

“What do you have Gary?” Terry asked.

“Another crossdraw holster with the Paladin on it and a 4⁵/₈” blued Ruger Vaquero.” Gary replied.

“Sure, why not?” Terry replied.

“Ain’t nothing better than fried chicken, Gary. Did you get yourself a piece?” Clarence asked.

“I’m a leg man Clarence, so I’ll go get me a breast and some potato salad,” Gary replied.

“Huh?” Ron said shaking his head.

◦

The residents were dragging in the logs with the dozer and replacing their firewood. In view of the coming winter, they laid in all of the firewood anyone had room to store and they stored more at the west end of the compound. The center of the compound had been seeded, trees planted and turned into a park. Mrs. Owens liked to walk her dog every morning and the 3 old geezers always stood by in case the dog got loose. There was something to be said for proper packaging.

Remember the Yuppies and the statement about the residents being ‘gentlemen farmers’? That’s the way it was in the summer and fall of 2007. There were a few aftershocks of that 8.9 quake triggered by that quake associated with the tsunami, but nothing over 4.0. They hadn’t heard any more news from those folks up north so they hoped that they were ok. NPR had reported that they had experienced a 1,300’ wall of water from the tsunami and vast portions of the area had been flooded.

◦

Monday, September 3, 2007... Year 2, Day 317 PT... Day 682 PT...

Labor Day was still an official holiday so they planned on a large celebration. They'd labored hard in the gardens putting in large stocks of food and had enough firewood stored for a year or more. Mother Nature didn't cooperate and Labor Day 2007 was a blizzard up on the mountain. They just moved the celebration to the community building and held it anyway. The Three Amigos had the table right next to Dr. Owens. The only ones interested in the food were the wives and Clarence. Ron and Gary weren't really interested in Kathy Ireland in the way you'd image, but she sure did help to keep their hearts a pumping. What was this thing with older men and younger women? The same darned thing, as with older women and younger men, that's what it was, except that the latter made more sense than the former.

The National Weather Service had reported via NPR that they could expect a storm lasting up to 10 days. It even snowed a little bit down in the valley. It looked to be a cold, hard winter. Some of the government seemed to be functioning the way it was supposed to be functioning, so maybe the country was getting it back together. Most of these people still had homes they could go back to. What had become Liberty Village had only ever been intended as a retreat anyway. It was never intended to become a permanent place to live. Were it not for the blizzard, several of the families would have probably already left. There was some talk of that Labor Day party being a farewell party for several of the folks including all of the Yuppies except for Terry and his family. They were just going to have to wait for 10 days for the weather to clear now.

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Monday, September 17, 2007... Year 2, Day 331 PT... Day 696 PT...

The snowstorm had ended on Thursday, September 13th, but it wasn't until today that the roads were clear enough for the people to leave. Three of the families leaving had no vehicles when they'd shown up. They had to be transported to their homes. They were:

Cabin 09: Jacobs, John, Karen, Johnny and Julia.

Cabin 10: Ralston, Bob, Camille, Robby, Glenda and Rose.

Cabin 11: Larson, Dick, Rosemary and Tommy.

The fella who had pretended to be Ron Brown was leaving and that wasn't the greatest loss. On the other hand, they were losing Ronnie and that was a loss because he had been a big help. Much to the dismay of some of the women and The Three Amigos, some other people were leaving, too. The other 4 families leaving included:

Cabin 12: Smith, Ronnie, Joann, Karen, Joann and William.

Cabin 13: Reynolds, James, Monica, John and Marie.

Cabin 17: Elliott, Sam, Katharine and Cleo.

Cabin 18: Olsen, Greg, Kathy, Erik, Lily and Chloe.

Fortunately the two survivalists, Bob Pelham and John Hewlett opted to spend the winter and possibly longer. Sheriff Gary Penrod came by during the afternoon wondering if the Deputies wanted to return to active duty. With the emergency essentially past, they decided that it was the thing to do. With things starting to return to normal in the valley, their services were desperately needed. The Sheriff's Department had its choppers up so Steve could return to his regular duties and the 3 other men could go on patrol in the valley. The men had a place or two they really wanted to check out, like that housing tract on North Riverside.

◦

Washington, DC...

"Mr. President, we have new forecasts on the weather this winter," Secretary of announced.

"Couldn't you bring me good news for a change?" Bush asked.

"You're the one with all of the connections to God, Mr. President, I'm just a public servant," Gutierrez replied. "Maybe you can get Jerry Falwell to help put in a good word. But to explain further, at higher latitudes, El Niño and La Niña are among a number of factors that influence climate. However, the impacts of El Niño and La Niña at these latitudes are most clearly seen in wintertime. In the continental US, during El Niño years, temperatures in the winter are warmer than normal in the North Central States, and cooler than normal in the Southeast and the Southwest. During a La Niña year, winter temperatures are warmer than normal in the Southeast and cooler than normal in the Northwest. El Niño was originally recognized by fisherman off the coast of South America as the appearance of unusually warm water in the Pacific Ocean, occurring near the beginning of the year. El Niño means The Little Boy or Christ child in Spanish. This name was used for the tendency of the phenomenon to arrive around Christmas. La Niña means The Little Girl. La Niña is sometimes called El Viejo, anti-El Niño, or simply "a cold event" or "a cold episode". There has been a confusing range of uses for the terms El Niño, La Niña by both the scientific community and the general public."

"I speak some Spanish, Mr. Secretary," Bush replied, "Is there a point to your ramblings?"

"We're going to have the worst El Niño year in recent memory, Mr. President," Gutierrez replied. "That will offset the colder weather in the North Central States, but the southwest is going to take it on the chin."

"Is it going to be a localized phenomenon or are we going to need to call out the National Guard?" Bush asked. "Assuming of course I could get them to even turn out. How certain are you of this?"

“The people over at NOAA are pretty certain, President Bush,” Gutierrez responded, “But you know how weathermen are, they’re always about 90% certain of their predictions.”

“I think maybe we’d better pass on calling out the Guard, then,” Bush replied. “I’d better save them for something important like if Russia invades.”

Bush was joking, of course, but the Secretary passed the joke on to an Assistant Secretary who didn’t realize it was a joke. Gutierrez didn’t realize that the Assistant Secretary took him seriously and leaked the information to the press. Did you ever play Telephone when you were a kid?

◦

Tuesday, September 18, 2007... Year 2, Day 332 PT... Day 697 PT...

“I don’t know what’s going to be worse,” Ron said, “25’ of snow or the Russians invading.”

The effects El Niño had on United States’ weather were less obvious. Back in 1982-1983, the US Gulf States and California received excessive rainfall. As the winter approached, forecasters expected excessive rainfall to occur again. Indeed, portions of central and southern California suffered record-breaking rainfall amounts. Damage consisted not only of flooding, but some mudslides destroyed communities in a flash – causing many casualties. Other problems could be found in the Gulf States, as severe weather was above average. Even though no one particular storm could be blamed on El Niño, many forecasters believed the event did increase the chances for such severe weather to occur.

“Ronald,” Gary said, “You are starting to sound a lot like Geraldo with your ‘the Russians are coming’ crap. Do you want to take his place? And, the only thing that predictable about the weather is that it is unpredictable.”

“But, they said on NPR that we’re going to have an El Niño this year with record snowfalls,” Ron protested. “And a statement was attributed to an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Commerce that Russia might invade.”

“Well then if that happens, we’ll roust out the 10th Calvary and repel the invasion,” Gary laughed. “But, until it does, let’s not worry about it. The snow thing could be right, but why are you saying 25’?”

“Sounded like a good number,” Ron admitted.

“You guys really ought to take that show on the road,” Jack chuckled.

“We already did when FEMA was at the front door, or did you forget?” Ron asked. “We took it right down there on Lytle Creek Road.”

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Sunday, September 30, 2007... Year 2, Day 344 PT... Day 709 PT...

The second heavy snowfall of the winter ended today leaving the mountains of southern California with up to an additional 56” of new snow, the announcer droned. The hardest hit area was Big Bear Lake Dam where they received the 56” snowfall. In other news, the Russian Federation filed a formal protest with the United Nations over statements aired in the media that they were planning to invade the United States. President Vladimir Putin issued a statement inquiring whether the US hadn’t already had enough. Russia ended 2006 with its eighth straight year of growth, averaging 6.5% annually since the financial crisis of 1998. Although high oil prices and a relatively cheap ruble are important drivers of this economic rebound, since 2000 investment and consumer-driven demand have played a noticeably increasing role. Real fixed capital investments have averaged gains greater than 10% over the last seven years and real personal incomes have averaged increases over 12%. Russia has also improved its international financial position since the 1998 financial crisis, with its foreign debt declining from 90% of GDP to zero.

“It sounds like those darned Ruskies are better off than we are,” Ron grouched.

“You could try and emigrate Ron, but I don’t know if they’d take someone with 1 eye, 9 toes and a bad heart,” Gary suggested. “Not to mention the stab wounds and bullet wounds all over your body.”

“You forgot to mention that my teeth come out like the stars at night,” Ron pointed out. “Anyway, we’re on our way to that 25’ of snow I warned you about. We already have 90” and it’s not even October yet.”

“I don’t like the idea of those Deputies being down in the valley for up to 2 weeks at a time,” Clarence said. “What will we do if the Russians really do attack?”

“I cannot believe that they would do that, Clarence, what would they have to gain?” Gary asked. “They are by-in-large atheists, none of the property in this country is worth taking and their country has continued to move in the general direction of a democracy.”

“The hard line Communists are still the largest party,” Ron said.

“You sound like someone who thinks that everyone has to do it our way, partner,” Gary retorted. “They should do what works for them. It isn’t any business of this country what form of government or political parties another country has. The US has spent years fighting Communism and in the process funded a lot of those petty fascist dictators who are as bad as old Joe Stalin ever was. It would be hard for anyone to be worse, but I

believe that some of them were almost as bad. I'm not a liberal but I believe that the US should mind its own business unless it has a reason to get involved."

"A reason like oil?" Ron asked.

"Not really, no," Gary answered. "We have plenty of oil for a long time to come. It's just those environmentalists keeping us from using it. Eventually we'll come up with alternative fuel sources like biodiesel. But Rome wasn't built in a day. On the other hand, the government should do more in the way of incentives."

"Hey did you fellas hear the weather forecast?" Terry asked.

"What another snowstorm?" Ron asked.

"We get a whole week of good weather," Terry replied.

"And then what?" Ron asked.

"Well, it does give us a week to get some snow blowers," Terry smiled.

"Terry, we have people at the gate," Sandy announced over the PA.

"What do you have Sandy?" Terry asked over his radio.

"I can't really tell, Terry, but since you the Assistant Head of Security, it's up to you to find out," she replied.

"You fellas want to help me out?" Terry asked.

"I'll get my bugle," Clarence replied.

"It's on that cord on your shoulder," Ron pointed out.

"Well I need something," Clarence said.

"You might get a rifle," Gary suggested.

"I don't need no rifle," Clarence insisted. "As bad as I blow this bugle, it'll scare them to death."

"Huh?" Gary asked.

"Ok, I'll get the rifle," Clarence agreed.

Big John – Chapter 27 – Retribution

It was colder than a well digger's butt outside and it took The Three Amigos an extra minute or two to get heavier coats, gloves, mufflers and watch caps before they headed to the top of the hill. Terry was far ahead of them and they were catching up but he had a substantial lead. Terry paused at the top of the hill, gave the two small groups of people at the drawbridge the once over and radioed Sandy to ask if she had any more information.

"Terry, they appear to be 2 couples with teenagers," Sandy replied. "The men are armed with shotguns, but that's all I can tell you."

"10-4, I'll check them out Sandy, stand by," Terry radioed.

Terry worked his way down the hill and stood beside the drawbridge. One man looked at the other who gave a brief nod. The men, who were holding the shotguns at port arms, dropped the shotguns to waist level and each fired a round, jacked in a second and fired again.

"That's for Dad," one of the men said as Terry was shoved violently backward and crumpled in a heap, dead before he hit the ground.

Just at that moment the amigos rounded the corner at the top of the hill and observed the shooting. They descended slowly with their M1A's pointed at the two men. Gary reached over and picked up Terry's radio.

"Sandy we have a 187 at the drawbridge, get a hold of Jack and the others and tell them it's a code 3," Gary radioed.

"10-4, what happened," Sandy asked.

"Terry's been shot, but I don't have the details yet, I'll get back to you," Gary responded.

The two men had stood there with their shotguns extended above their heads. Ron gestured with his rifle and they put the shotguns on the ground and raised their hands. Clarence negotiated lowering the drawbridge.

"What's this all about?" Ron asked. "Give me one good reason why we shouldn't cut you down right here and now."

"He killed our father and we've been tracking him for months," one of the men said.

In the distance the chop-chop-chop of the Sheriff's Department helicopter could be heard and two sirens were barely audible further down Lytle Creek Road, but drawing nearer. Gary had half a mind to just shoot the men, but for some inexplicable reason he just joined Ron and Clarence and covered them. He didn't know why, but he sensed it

was the proper thing to do. Maybe it was the fact that the men had made no attempt to run and that they had their families with them. Steve came down the road as fast as the conditions permitted.

“Don’t bother, Steve, Terry is dead,” Gary told Steve while Steve checked Terry’s body.

“I’m a Deputy with the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department and I want you spread eagle on the ground,” Steve indicated pulling his service pistol.

Steve crossed the drawbridge, frisked the men and cuffed both of them. He roughly helped them to their feet and motioned with his pistol that they should start the trek up the hill. At the base of the fire road, two patrol cars pulled up, slowed and negotiated the fire road. The two cars, one containing Jack and Marty and the other containing Sergeant, followed the group as they ascended the hill. Jack and Marty paused only long enough to load Terry’s lifeless body into their patrol car.

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When they entered the compound the two men and their families were unceremoniously ushered to the community building and everyone advised to clear the building. The men were seated in one area, their families in a second and The Three Amigos at a table. Jack had a brief huddle with the other Deputies and they split into 2-man teams to question the shooters. After 40 minutes or so of questioning, the teams swapped tables and repeated the process. Much to the consternation of the other 3 Deputies, Jack made certain that the two shooters were well treated, as were their families. Next, they visited briefly with the families and finally with The Three Amigos.

The story unfolded with a twist or two. Both men were from the valley and brothers. Their father had owned the gun store in Running Springs. The father tended to be forgetful and hadn’t given any thought to the video camera that snapped a picture of the store’s interior once per minute. An employee of the store had been responsible for changing the tapes, periodically. With the draconian California gun laws, their father refused to recycle the tapes and he had them stacked from floor to ceiling in his basement at home. He had made some notes and pulled the tape and left a note of the day the man purchased the 7.62x51mm ammunition. The SBSB was interested in that particular purchase was all the note had said.

Then, the earthquake came and they had other things to be concerned about. They retrieved the tape of the day of the shooting and matched the picture of the shooter to that of the man who had purchased the 7.62x51mm ammo. They hadn’t been able to put it all together until the latter part of October 2005. Just before they were ready to present the whole package to the SBSB, the Chinese attacked and they ended up first in an Army camp and later in a FEMA camp. When Jack and the others had affected their release from the FEMA camp, they had recognized the shooter as being one of the ten men. It had taken them a while longer to trace the man to Liberty Village and then there were the snowstorms.

Uncertain that they'd receive justice, they came to Liberty Village to exact their own revenge. As fate would have it, the shooter was the very man who had come to the draw-bridge to inquire what they'd wanted. Their stories were the same and they had the tapes to prove their claims. After Jack and the others had questioned the men, Jack took the others aside and told him all that he knew about Terry. They viewed the tapes and they only confirmed what the shooters and Jack had said. The Deputies concluded that with the status of law and order in the US today, the best solution to their situation was to bury Terry and let the two men go. The Three Amigos were quick to protest.

"Here's your Paladin rig back, Gary," Jack handed the rig to Gary. "Pour yourselves a cup of coffee and I'll explain."

"This had better be good," Ron said.

"It's ironic that you gave Terry the Paladin rig, Gary because Terry was a professional assassin," Jack started to explain. Jack then went on to tell the 3 old geezers the complete story leaving nothing out. Terry's wife and stepchildren would be allowed to stay or leave, whatever they decided.

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Monday, October 1, 2007... Year 2, Day 345 PT... Day 710 PT...

A grave was dug, Terry buried and Jack visited with Barbara McQueen about her plans. She didn't seem to be overly broken up about Terry's death. She indicated that she and the kids were leaving to return to Big Bear City and going back to their real names. So, later in the day the widow of the Navy Lt. Commander took their children and returned to Big Bear City. The 2 men had saved her the trouble of killing her new husband. Apparently, Terry was a little sloppier than anyone knew. NCIS had been able to identify the shooter and they'd told the widow. They didn't have a picture, but they had an eye-witness sketch, courtesy of the late Mr. Summers. Jack and the other's took a day off because they hadn't had any time off in a couple of weeks.

"It's strange, Moira," Jack said, "I had decided that God would have to extract vengeance for Terry killing that gun storeowner. It seems that God didn't wait for him to die naturally."

"Jack, things have a way of evening out," Moira replied. "How long will the 4 of you be gone this time?"

"We'll be home Friday night, honey," Jack replied. "We're supposed to get another snowstorm and we'd rather be here than stuck in the valley."

"Who is going to take over as Assistance Head of Security for Liberty Village?" Moira asked.

"I think I'll put Derek Olsen in charge," Jack replied, "He is the logical choice. Maybe he'll make The Three Amigos his assistants. It will give them something to do besides sit around the community building and whine about Kathy Ireland leaving."

"Why did they go, Jack?" Moira asked.

"Things are returning to some semblance of normal down below and I guess they just wanted to go home," Jack speculated. "They have weapons and some food. Dr. Owens could do a lot more good down there instead of being up here."

"Don't they know about the old wives tale?" Moira asked. "We still have a few events to go."

"You, too?" Jack chuckled. "The only people who haven't mentioned that have been The Three Amigos."

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Friday, October 5, 2007... Year 2, Day 349 PT... Day 714 PT...

"I have a bad feeling, Ron," Gary said. "You know how bad things seem to come in threes. NPR said that this storm could dump another 3 feet of snow."

"That's a bunch of foolishness, Gary," Clarence said.

"I don't think so, Clarence," Gary disputed. "When my father died back in 2001, before it was all said and done, I lost a total of 9 relatives in less than a year."

"Dad," Derek said entering the community building, "How about you, Ron and Clarence each taking one of the guard towers for the next 4 hours?"

"Kid, you must be nuts," Gary said. "Ron just took his water pill and I can't climb a ladder. Besides, what's to guard? The snow out there is butt deep on a 9' Indian and we're getting another snowstorm. I was coming to see you anyway. You want the Paladin rig?"

"Nope. I have a Glock model 20," Derek replied. "You can just hang it on the wall for now."

By the time that Jack, Sergeant, Steve and Marty returned to Liberty Village late in the evening, it was snowing so hard you could barely see from one end of the Village to the other. Over the course of the summer, they had added streetlights, although the Village had but the single street running from east to west. They had finally begun to light the lights when the 4 Deputies had returned to work. You wouldn't think that the people still living there could find enough to occupy their time to justify their not working at some

sort of job down in the valley. The Three Amigos considered themselves retired however, and there were enough chores to keep the others busy. There were livestock to feed, stalls to muck, eggs to gather and someone had to keep tabs on the inventory of goods. It was still very much a closed community and it had its own security force with Jack in nominal charge but with Derek carrying out the day-to-day activities.

By late evening on Friday, they had another foot of snow on the ground and the snow was getting heavier. Ron had mentioned the snow blowers to Jack and they had several in the back of the pickup they were driving to and from work. Jose and Manny bundled up warmly and cleared the sidewalk and used that old snowplow to clear the street. NPR was reporting that the National Weather Service was revising its estimates of the storm and said that it could possibly last a week to ten days. Accumulations could be expected up to 48", possibly more.

"How's the world of law enforcement these days?" Gary asked Jack and the others who had gathered in the community building after supper.

"With the fuel shortage, people aren't driving as fast," Sergeant replied. "And we don't get many calls to resolve problems. People seem to have found a way to resolve a lot of those problems on their own."

"Is it snowing down below?" Ron asked.

"The snow is very localized, but the Inland Empire seems to be one of the localities," Jack replied.

"That means that the snow is down to what, 900'?" Gary asked.

"Maybe even 800', Gary," Jack answered. "If it gets much deeper up here, we aren't going to have anywhere to move it."

"Are you sure we aren't entering another ice age?" Clarence asked.

"I can't be positive, of course," Jack replied, "I think they would have told us if we were."

"Clarence, eat a dish of ice cream," Ron suggested. "It will make your inside as cold as your outside and you'll feel just fine."

"We have enough firewood?" Clarence asked next.

"There must be 15 cords at every home and another 200 stacked by the end of the village," Jack replied.

"Well, I'm going home and stoke up my stove," Clarence said. "How's come we ain't got no furnaces?"

“These are just vacation cabins, Clarence,” Steve explained. “We never intended to live here permanently when we started off expanding.”

“Yeah right, that’s why you built that auditorium,” Clarence said putting on his coat to brave the snow.

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Saturday, October 6, 2007... Year 2, Day 350 PT... Day 715 PT...

The snow didn’t let up as forecasted and during late afternoon, NPR had a revised forecast. They were now expected to get 60” of snow rather than a maximum of 48”, the possibly of more had changed from a possible to probable. They stopped trying to keep the road in front of the cabins clear and the snow blowers were having trouble from the beginning throwing the snow over the existing mounds. The National Weather Service claimed that the storm was stalled, but would move on by the first of the week after next in keeping with their original forecast. There was more moisture than expected and the drought was considered over.

Statistically, Alaska was the safest state to live in, in terms of numbers of disasters, but when they had a natural disaster, it was a lulu. Like back in 1964. On the other hand North Carolina had the most events in the past 25 years. California weather seemed to wave in the breeze, like a limp-wristed liberal. Some years they’d get too much moisture and spur the undergrowth and the following year it would get dry and half the state would burn. On other occasions, they’d get moisture early and dry up later, getting both.

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Wednesday, October 10, 2007... Year 2, Day 354 PT... Day 719 PT...

Just after Jack turned off the radio and heard that the snow might continue for another day or two, it stopped snowing. An hour later the sky was clear and Jennifer and Joey wanted to go build a snowman. Moira bundled them up but the snow was too dry to make a good snowman so they got out the sled he’d brought home and gave them rides up and down the sidewalk. Manny and Jose were out cleaning off the road and the sidewalk and Randy got the dozer to clear the fire road. Now all they needed was for the County to come by and clear Lytle Creek Road. Two hours later Sheriff Penrod called and said that there was a problem getting the road cleared so he’d see them the following Monday.

“Hey Jack are you guys going to plow out the rifle range?” Clarence asked.

“I hadn’t planned on it why?” Jack asked.

“We need to get in some rifle practice to be ready for the Russian invasion,” Clarence explained.

“There isn’t going to be a Russian invasion, Clarence,” Jack laughed. “That was all just a misunderstanding.”

“Oh yeah? You tell that to the guy on NPR,” Clarence said.

“What do you mean, Clarence?” Jack asked. “I was listening to NPR only 2 hours ago and nobody said anything about a Russian invasion.”

“Go listen for yourself,” Clarence huffed.

...ent Bush denied claims today made by President Vladimir Putin that the US was trying to goad the Russian Federation into expanding its dispute with the European Union to include Great Britain. Bush went on to say that The United Kingdom and the United States remain the strongest of allies and that Putin is looking for an excuse to expand the stalemated confrontation with the EU to include Great Britain and thereby the United States. Bush said that the United States took a major blow from China in the October 2005 confrontation but that the US military remained strong and was prepared to rush to Britain’s aid at the first sign of trouble. In other news, the pacific storm took an unexpected turn and moved to the east in what weathermen are describing as a most unusual...

Jack turned off the radio and headed to the community building. Sergeant, Marty and Steve were sitting at a table waiting for the coffee to finish dripping.

“We heard, but it doesn’t mean that we’re going to war with Russia,” Sergeant said. “It’s just some more of their political posturing. The Russians aren’t as foolish as the Chinese, Jack. Anyway the UK is in the EU.”

“You guys want coffee?” Jack asked.

“Yeah, bring the pot, we already have the cups,” Sergeant said.

“You guys think it’s going to be cold tomorrow?” Jack asked, changing the subject.

“The temperature has risen about 5 degrees since it quit snowing so I think we’re in for some warm weather,” Steve replied.

“I had enough of this snow to last me for a long time,” Jack acknowledged. “Do you think I should get Randy to knock the snow off the entrance to the shelter?”

“Because we’re going to need it or just because it’s a good idea,” Sergeant half laughed.

“It doesn’t matter what the reason is, do you think I should asked him to do it?” Jack responded, slightly irritated.

“Do what?” Randy asked walking in the door and pouring a cup of coffee.

“Clear off the entrance to the shelter, sport,” Jack explained.

“Already did it Jack or didn’t you hear, the Russians are coming,” Randy winked. “Cleared off the shooting range while I was at it and those old goats are out there shooting for all they’re worth.”

“You don’t suppose we should get out there too, do you?” Steve asked.

“You’re just trying to catch a cold so you can get a few days off from work,” Sergeant laughed.

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“This is ridiculous, Clarence,” Gary insisted. “The Russians would never invade the United States. I may be wrong, but I think the last movie they made about a Russian invasion was *Red Dawn*.”

“If you don’t agree with Clarence, partner, what are you doing out here?” Ron asked.

“Keeping you company,” Gary replied.

“Then why are you firing your rifle?” Ron asked.

“I’m using the heat off the barrel to keep my hands warm,” Gary answered.

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Monday, October 15, 2007... Year 2, Day 359 PT... Day 724 PT...

It was a balmy 45 degrees and the snow was melting off really quickly. The Russians hadn’t invaded and Jack, Steve, Marty and Sergeant had gone back to work. Clarence was at the range again, practicing. Ron and Gary were in the community building watching the DVD of *Red Dawn* (1984). The radio was on in the background low enough so Ron could hear but Gary couldn’t. Gary had the TV turned up so loud that Ron didn’t hear the radio let go with the EAS tone. In an unusual turn of circumstances not one of the families at Liberty Village had their radios on, assuming perhaps, that Ron and Gary had it covered. Neither did they hear the broadcast that announced:

In response to a perceived threat by the Russian Federation, President Bush raised the defense condition to DEFCON 4 and the Department of Homeland Security raised the Threat Level to Yellow. Sources close to the White House revealed that several of the refurbished Russian nuclear submarines sailed from their homeports within the past 48 hours. While there is no indication that there is any particular significance attached to

the sailings, the adjustment to the defense condition and threat level were viewed as a precautionary measure. Stay tuned for further developments.

“I’ve never have like the ending to that movie,” Ron said. “All of those kids getting killed.”

“What did you expect with 8 high school kids up against the Cuban and Russian armies?” Gary asked. “All movies can’t have Walt Disney endings, real life doesn’t. Ron, we’ve had pretty good luck because we haven’t really ever had to go up against anybody that was a professional soldier.”

“Well, that and your love for barbed wire,” Ron agreed.

“It doesn’t stop them, it just slows them down,” Gary disagreed. “Gives you a chance to defend yourself. Hell, even the drawbridge didn’t stop those FEMA people. If they’d have let the military come in with those clearing gadgets they have, the minefield wouldn’t have stopped anyone.”

“I don’t think that’s true, Gar-Bear,” Ron disagreed. “I went to that Global website and looked up countermine measures back when you were writing one of those stories of yours. The US simply doesn’t have much when it comes to clearing minefields. Most of the time, commanders just bypass the minefields if they can.”

“The problem with those M-16 mines is that they have an anti-handling device so the only safe way to get rid of them is to explode them,” Gary pointed out. “I guess that means that the minefield these people have won’t be going anywhere. The military hasn’t bought any new M14 and M-16 mines in 30 years.”

“They aren’t a hell of a lot of protection under 6’ of snow,” Ron chuckled.

“I guess it’s a good thing the Russians aren’t invading,” Gary agreed.

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Tuesday, October 16, 2007... Year 2, Day 360 PT... Day 725 PT...

Today Russian President Putin responded to President Bush’s raising of the defense condition to DEFCON 4 yesterday by raising the alert status of their ground and naval forces. Russia has a limited surface fleet so that may not be particularly significant. Informed sources told NPR that the Russian early warning network constructed by the former Soviet Union to detect a ballistic missile attack is perhaps the most neglected component of their strategic posture. Many ground radars no longer operate or routinely suffer power outages and other afflictions; only three of its nine modern radars (large phased-array radars) are working at all. Three have been deactivated or never completed, and three are inoperable or barely functional. Seven out of ten older, less capable Hen House radars sit outside Russia in former Soviet republics, and some of them may

be shut down for political reasons. Two of the nine slots in Russia's constellation of early warning satellites monitoring US and Chinese ICBM fields are empty, and Russia lacks satellite coverage of the oceans. So information provided by these sensors is becoming increasingly unreliable. However, with the demise of the People's Republic of China, those assets covering China have no doubt been redeployed to cover this country.

Another source suggested that as of 1997, the Federation determined that a missile attack on the United States whether a first strike or a retaliatory strike would amount to suicide for the Russian forces and their country. As most of our audience knows, the Federation replaced the previous military commander of the Russian Defense Agency with a civilian named Ivanov in 2001. It is believed by many that should the US and Russian get involved in a war it is as likely to be fought in Europe as in the US mainland. Stay tuned for further developments at the top of the hour.

"I told you," Clarence said grinning from ear-to-ear.

"Why are you so happy that the Russians and US might end up in a war?" Ron asked.

"Just because it means I was right and you two were wrong," Clarence grinned. "They won't come here, they'd have transportation problems. But, they could stop their pussy-footing and launch a full out attack against the EU."

"We'd be ok if that happened, the UK isn't part of the EU," Ron said.

"Bzzz, wrong answer Ronald, the UK has been a member since 1973, what they haven't done is to adopt the Euro as their currency," Gary said.

"Then that means if Russia goes to war with the EU..." Ron began.

"...we'll be sucked into it," Gary finished for him.

"Crap," was Ron's only reply.

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Friday, October 19, 2007... Year 2, Day 363 PT... Day 728 PT...

The White House announced today that the President has determined that it was appropriate to raise the defense condition to DEFCON 3 and the Threat Level to Orange. Secretary of State Rice has been sent to Brussels to consult with the Russian ambassador to the UN. DEFCON 3 represents an increase in force readiness above normal readiness. EMERGCNONS are national level reactions in response to ICBM (missiles in the air) attack. By definition, other forces go to DEFCON 1 during an EMERGCNONS. A DEFENSE EMERGENCY, one of the two EMERGCNONS, is a major attack upon US forces overseas, or allied forces in any area, and is confirmed either by the commander

of a unified or specified command or higher authority or an overt attack of any type is made upon the United States and is confirmed by the commander of a unified or specified command or higher authority. Stay tuned for further developments.

One of the other things The Three Amigos had done but hadn't thought about was banding together. Gary took a pill to aid sleep and when he was asleep, the house or cabin could burn down and he'd sleep right through it. Maybe as loud as he snored, he'd frighten off any would be attacker but it was a lead pipe cinch he'd probably never hear them. The Three Amigos idea of circling the wagons included gathering their immediate families around them if possible. They wrapped themselves in a barbed wire fence with homemade concertina up in Palmdale. And the first place they hit when TSHTF was the National Guard Armory on 30th Street East. They clowned around a lot, but that gave them an outlet for their anxiety and basic insecurities. When it came to fundamental security, it wasn't a joking matter. And, while they might joke among themselves, it wasn't so funny if you tried to take on their whole gang. There is safety in numbers. Now, if Gary could just figure out how to mount a M60 machine gun on that wheelchair of his...

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Saturday, October 20, 2007... Year 2, Day 364 PT... Day 729 PT...

Russia today announced military exercises along its western borders. Informed sources suggest that the exercises are in response to the raising of the defense condition yesterday to DEFCON 3. President Putin said the exercises had been in the offing for several months and unannounced since they would be confined to Russian soil. Leaves were cancelled and the military brought to an increased level of readiness when the nation moved to DEFCON 4 on October 15th. US Naval vessels have been provisioning and are nearly ready to set sail. Cargo vessels have been brought in and the Army has begun to load armor, guns and vehicles in preparation for a possible move to the United Kingdom. Stay tuned for further developments. We now return you to the program in progress.

"At least they'll be fighting it over there instead of over here," Gary said. "I guess we're just going to have to save the French from their own big mouths again. I think that's why there's a European Union in the first place. It gives those Frenchmen somebody's skirts to hide behind."

"Yeah and the British will be complaining that that Americans are overpaid, overfed, oversexed and over here, again," Ron chuckled.

"Personally, I don't like it fellas," Jack joined the conversation. "With the Army out and about we haven't had many problems with those gangs of convicts. Some of the prisons got emptied out when the Chinese hit the US. They have mostly confined their activities to rural areas but they could group together and move to areas of higher population concentrations like the Inland Empire."

“Did you fellas ever get that place on North Riverside checked out?” Clarence asked.

“It was a bunch of overanxious liberals who’d never handled guns before and were shooting at anyone who came near their housing tract,” Sergeant explained. “That’s why no one got hurt. The safest place to be was in front of their guns.”

“Did you let them keep their guns?” Ron asked.

“There’s still a 2nd Amendment, Ron,” Jack replied. “Besides, all they had were politically correct weapons like .22 rifles, shotguns and hunting rifles.”

“That beats a stick in the eye,” Ron suggested.

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Sunday, October 21, 2007... Year 2, Day 365 PT... Day 730 PT...

They held a potluck dinner in the community building to celebrate their all having survived the end of the world for 2 full years. Technically they wouldn’t start year 3 until the next day, but the next day was a workday so they couldn’t. Jack, Steve, Marty and Sergeant would be down the hill directing traffic or whatever it was they did down there and would start returning back to Liberty Village in the evenings for a change. There must be power back on because the streetlights were on at night down below. Sure wasn’t much traffic though, Sergeant mentioned that the government was clamping down on fuel supplies, possibly for the military.

Big John – Chapter 28 – Over There

Monday, October 22, 2007... Year 3, Day 1 PT... Day 731 PT...

Russian Forces began their exercises in the early morning hours today,” the announcer reported. “The United States has pre-positioned some Air Forces and helicopters in France and Germany. USS Wasp, USS Kearsarge, USS Baatan and USS Iwo Jima transported large numbers of Apache and Cobra attack helicopters to Dunkirk, France and Wilhelmshaven, Germany. The fleets of ships had downloaded all but a single Naval helicopter and their Harrier fighters to allow them to transport the Army and Marine helicopters. The ships are returning to Norfolk to pick up their normal complement of aircraft and US Marines. Additional Apache helicopters are being ferried to Germany using the C-5 Galaxies.

The White House announced that there would be temporary shortages of fuel due to the military preparations. President Bush announced through his press secretary that the US will withdraw sufficient quantities from the Strategic Reserve in the coming days to make up for the shortfall. Bush called upon Congress to pass necessary legislation to reinstate the draft. Loading of Army armor forces continues at...

“It’s going to be another war and our Army isn’t all that large,” Ron suggested. “What’s your draft status, Gary?”

“I’ll have to look, Ron,” Gary laughed. “I still have my draft card in my wallet. But, if I remember, I was 5A the last time I looked.”

“When was that?” Clarence asked.

“Uh, 1978,” Gary replied. “Do you think I could get a student deferment if I went back to college and got a PhD?”

“Only to the end of the semester, Gar-Bear,” Ron laughed, “They changed the rules. They’ll activate the Reserves and the Guard while they train the draftees. Hell, the war could be over before they get out of basic training.”

“Why do you still carry your draft card, Gary?” Clarence asked. “You’re 64 years old.”

“Well, when I registered for Selective Service, they told me I had to keep my draft card in my possession at all times,” Gary replied. “I don’t remember ever getting a letter saying I could quit carrying it. However, to change the subject slightly, you do remember when I tried to kill myself a few years ago?”

“I remember,” Ron said, “What about it?”

“Sometimes, I think I succeeded in killing myself and everything I experienced since then has just been what’s happened since I died and went to hell,” Gary said very seriously. “I haven’t been able to please anyone since.”

“Sometimes Gary, you have a pretty vivid imagination,” Ron replied. “You almost scare me.”

“That’s ok partner, sometimes I scare myself.” Gary muttered. “In a lot of ways, it’s all been like a bad dream ever since then.”

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Tuesday, October 22, 2007... Year 3, Day 1 PT... Day 731 PT...

US aircraft carriers set sail today for Europe. The groups include USS John F. Kennedy CV67, USS Enterprise CVN65, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower CVN69, USS Theodore Roosevelt CVN71, USS George Washington CVN73 and USS Harry S. Truman CVN75. Each carrier task group carried its full complement of naval aircraft. The Amphibious Assault Ships should reach their homeport in Norfolk this weekend and should set sail back to Europe sometime next week. Loading of the Army’s armored forces continues. Sources close to the Administration said today that most of the A-10 gunships also began loading overnight. In a narrow vote, Congress defeated the Administration’s request to reinstitute the draft.

In other news President Putin of the Russian Federation said the US action was uncalled for and that the Federation would respond in kind to any provocation. It is believed, but unconfirmed, that the Russian forces have tactical nuclear weapons fielded with their forces engaged in the field exercise. The United States military remains at DEFCON 3, but the Department of Homeland Security announced earlier today that it was considering raising the Threat Level to Red. No explanation was given for the announcement. The west coast continues to enjoy warmer weather although the National Weather Service cautions that it is too early to tell if there is a change in the weather pattern.

“I’m telling you,” Ron said, “We are headed for war. The million-dollar question is whether or not those Ruskies will use nuclear weapons when we start to kick their ass.”

“I would think that it might depend on whether we allow them to withdraw with dignity and some of their forces intact,” Gary speculated. “If we knock them too far down, they might feel like they have nothing to lose.”

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White House Situation Room, Washington, DC...

“...so, as you can see Mr. President the Russians have roughly divided their forces $\frac{2}{3}$ north and $\frac{1}{3}$ south. The southern exercise, should they turn it into an invasion of Europe, will see them attacking Romania, Hungary, Moldavia and Bulgaria. They can't go too far because they will run into the Austrian and Italian Alps. In the north where they have the majority of their forces, they'll come through the Balkans and Belarus. This will allow them to enter Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. We expect the Germans to mobilize and position their forces in eastern Germany. They will execute a fighting withdrawal to the Fulda Gap where the US, British, remaining Germans and some of the French forces will be waiting with the Abrams M1A2SEPs, Leopard 2s, Challenger 2s and Leclerc Mk 2 Main Battle Tanks. In terms of air assets, they have the Ka-50 Hokum A, Ka-52 Hokum B and Mil Mi-28 Havoc attack helicopters, which are comparable to our Apaches. The Germans and French have the Tiger Attack helicopters and the British have the AH Mk 1 Apaches.

“Their front line Main Battle tanks include the T-90S and a new tank we haven't seen before. Our best estimate is that it is a cross between their T-95 and the Chinese 98. Apparently they got some of those Chinese scientists out before Taiwan became the de facto government of China. We've designated the new tank the T-107. This new tank is on par with the tanks of the allied nations. It's built on a T-95 undercarriage with a redesigned turret. The Russian backup armor consists of the T-90U and the T-72S Main Battle tanks.

“We are turning around the C5A's with more Longbow Apaches and have the 82nd Airborne aboard C-141's on their way to Germany. The follow on will be the 101st. Current US ground forces in Germany consist mainly of the 1st Armored and 1st Infantry Divisions. We'll follow up the 101st with the 10th Mountain Division plus 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions. Our A-10's must be ferried by ships to Europe as do our armor and mechanized forces.”

“Why are we so certain that this is a ruse instead of an exercise?” Bush asked.

“In a real exercise we don't believe they'd split their forces. We used to have an exercise called REFORGER, an acronym for Return Forces to Germany. We haven't had that exercise since 1993. However, we're dusting off the battle plans even as we speak.”

“What about those submarines of theirs that they put to sea? Any more information on those?” Bush asked.

“They are the 971 Bars class, Mr. President, The NATO designation is Akula. They are a combination of three generations of subs but have all been improved which appears to have included modifications to silence the subs further.”

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Wednesday, October 23, 2007... Year 3, Day 2 PT... Day 732 PT...

"I just don't get it," Clarence said. "Parts of this country have had the crap kicked out of it. California has been hurt the worst of all. It just seems to me that we should be concerned about rebuilding instead of going to war."

"That kid of mine went and reenlisted yesterday," Gary said. "I think that boy has a death wish. But, they gave him his stripes back and put him in a tank. His training is fairly fresh so he said he'd probably be in a 2nd line unit. He managed to get in touch with a buddy of his with the Iowa Guard and the two of them will be fighting side by side. The other guy is quite the story. Got put in for a Silver Star in Iraqi Freedom but the Company CO only had a Bronze Star so he disciplined him instead. They were in a guard tower getting sniped at and he intentionally exposed himself to draw the sniper's fire. That let them pin-down which building the sniper was in and he got an M-60 and stood on a wall firing at the building. The sniper got away, but the building was surrounded by a flock of sheep. He managed to kill most of them."

"Were the sheep carrying AK-47's or RPG's?" Ron asked.

"Maybe they were working on an IED, Ron," Clarence chuckled.

"What I can't figure out is how they're managing to get the armor loaded so fast," Gary commented. "That radio report this morning said they were almost done and that the A-10's have been loaded."

"Gary, it takes a fixed amount of time to load those ships," Ron suggested. "So, if they got done earlier than you thought they should, it can only mean that they started earlier."

"They have all 109 Galaxies flying 6 Apaches at a time over to Germany, so it won't take long to get all of them over there," Gary observed.

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Washington, DC...

"Observations from our Senior Citizen (Aurora) aircraft show that the Russians are re-supplying their training exercises at a level far beyond what they'd need to complete the exercises, Mr. President."

"When do those ships set sail with our armor and A-10's?" Bush asked.

"About 1400 hours, Mr. President. Figure 7-8 days for them to get there and a couple of weeks to unload."

"Are those Russians going to hold off that long?" Bush asked.

“Probably not, but we have our Apache helicopters almost fully deployed and the Cobra’s won’t be far behind.”

“So our forces won’t be in place when the Russians attack, if they attack?” Bush summarized.

“President Clinton stopped the REFORGER exercises, Mr. President. It was part of the peace dividend.”

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Tuesday, November 6, 2007... Year 3, Day 16 PT... Day 746 PT...

Liberty Village...

“Nice of them to get the TV networks back up,” Gary observed. “Probably did it so we can watch the war. I wonder what the Russians are waiting on. They wait much longer and we’ll have our armor unloaded and deployed.”

“At least we don’t have to worry about Geraldo telling the Russians where our units are,” Ron noted.

“People like him are a lot like cockroaches, Ron. Just when you think you have them all killed off, another surfaces to take its place.” Gary pointed out.

“Well, it must be going to happen,” Clarence said.

“What makes you think so, Clarence?” Ron asked.

“CNN has Christiane Amanpour in Germany,” Clarence replied.

◦

Not your usual survival scenario? There have been plenty of disasters in this story, natural and man-made. Of course, the odds against them all happening like they did over a short period of time seem to be astronomic. What were the odds against Jack winning that jackpot in Vegas at the beginning of the story? Why couldn’t the events all happen like this? Mankind has no control over things like earthquakes and tsunamis. The condition the world found itself in 2005 at the beginning of the 2nd Bush Administration with China and Russia getting cozy was at the minimum, alarming. Who knows what terrorists were planning and who ever said that it was proven to be terrorists in the first place?

In the aftermath of World War III, what would it really be like? Would you be forced to eat the family dog as some have suggested? Or, will you have some preparations that make that unnecessary? Those preparations won’t do you much good if you’re at

ground zero, so have you looked around and seen where is a safe place to live? The characters in this story were prepared, but what if those Chinese missiles had hit a few miles further east? There is no reason to believe that a substantial portion of the US military assets couldn't survive a nuclear confrontation, either. El Niño and La Niña are weather effects that don't read the newspaper and happen when they happen, even 2 days, 2 weeks or 2 years after an earthquake or nuclear war. Forest fires are just nature's way of clearing away the underbrush. They haven't always put them out in the past.

What makes you think that the entire Russian Fleet was sitting in some harbor somewhere turning to rust? A lot of their missiles can't fly due to age and infirmity. And their missile warning system was in a serious state of disrepair. On the other hand, the Russians have always been good at building tanks. Some of their aircraft rival those of the remainder of the world. The problem wasn't the aircraft, it was the command and control system associated with the use of those aircraft. Their air-to-air missiles seemed to work, they shot down KAL Flight 7. The Kursk, as a point of information, was an Oscar II class submarine. 35 knots equals 40 mph, the speed of an Akula.

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"I wonder if we missed cleaning out any armories," Clarence pondered.

"If we did, it's too late now," Gary suggested. "The military has probably taken them over to recover what they can to fight the war with. We got there first and took all we could carry. Someone probably came along after us and took anything that we missed."

"Why did you always insist on hitting the armories first and the grocery stores second?" Ron asked.

"Simple logic, Ron," Gary laughed. "You don't need food if you're dead and without guns you will get dead a whole lot sooner. With guns if someone beats you to the grocery store, you can either trade with them or use the guns to take the food. What's the point of salvaging all of those things if you lack the means to protect what you take? These people here were doing the same thing we were, collecting the essentials to tide them over until the country got back on its feet. What are you looking at Clarence?"

"The sky, Gary, just the sky," Clarence replied.

"Right, a great big rock is going to slam into the planet," Gary laughed.

"You never know," Clarence murmured.

◦

San Bernardino...

“What’s this directive from Homeland Security all about?” Jack asked Sergeant. “I thought we’d seen the last of those NIC’s.”

“I don’t know any more than the memo says, Jack,” Sergeant replied. “I guess that they have their computers back online. I also heard that everyone had to report so they could add the biometric data to the NIC’s and the database. Finally, I heard that the Internet would be coming back up tomorrow.”

“That will make Gary happy,” Jack smiled. “All he ever does is whine because he can’t get his daily fix off the Frugal Squirrel website.”

“They raised the Threat Level to Red about an hour ago,” Sergeant pointed out.

“Yeah, I heard, Sergeant; was there any particular reason that you know of?” Jack asked.

“Not that I heard no,” Sergeant said. “They also grounded the few commercial flights that had started back up. The only way we’re going to have an airline industry is if the government runs it.”

“That makes sense,” Jack agreed. “The only things up and running are all under the control of Washington.”

If the reports were true that the Russians lacked that capacity to launch their nukes and the government was taking over much of what had heretofore been private enterprise, what did it suggest that Bush might have in mind by pushing the Russians into a war? Reagan had pushed the Soviet economy into a collapse. Was this just Bush’s way of pushing the country the rest of the way and removing the Russian threat once and for all? It seemed to be a pretty high price to pay in terms of American and European lives, if it were true. Bush had seen to reforming American society in a number of ways including but not limited to, a major reform of Social Security. Only China had posed a threat along with Russia and China was history.

“What are you writing about now, Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“I talked to Sandy and Moira and got some background of what went on with these folks before we came along,” Gary replied. “I was thinking about writing it up and posting the story on the Frugal Website if it ever comes back up.”

“What are you going to call it?” Ron asked.

“I think maybe ‘Big John’,” Gary replied.

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Wednesday, November 7, 2007... Year 3, Day 17 PT... Day 747 PT...

Liberty Village...

“Jack said last night that we have to get the biometric data added to our NIC’s,” Gary told Ron.

“One of these days, you’re going to have to get permission from the government to take a pee,” Ron grouched.

“Senator Ted Kennedy introduced legislation today aimed at restricting firearm ownership to the police and military plus individuals licensed by the government to own firearms. Critics claim this is a direct attack on the 2nd Amendment while supporters claim that the 2nd Amendment was only intended to authorize a militia, a role now assumed by the National Guards. Many feel that the bill would have had a better chance of passage if it had been introduced before the Chinese attack. Senators Kennedy, Clinton, Schumer, Biden, Feinstein, Boxer and Leahy have announced a nationwide tour in support of the bill.”

“Hmm, I wonder,” Gary said.

“Wonder what, Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“If it’s possible to fall in a tub of chit and come out smelling like a rose,” Gary replied.

“Just don’t miss any of them,” Ron suggested.

◦

The Russian artillery included the 2S7 Pion 203mm self-propelled gun. The gun was capable of firing an atomic cannon shell. The largest question mark regarding Russian nuclear forces had to do with the current status and future plans of Russia’s non-strategic nuclear forces. In October 1991, a week after President George Bush’s announcement to reduce, redeploy, and abolish certain nuclear weapon systems, President Mikhail Gorbachev responded with initiatives of his own. These included a pledge to dismantle all atomic land mines by 1998, all nuclear artillery shells by 2000, half of all surface-to-air missile warheads by 1996, half of all tactical naval warheads by 1995 (with the other half stored ashore), and half of the bombs of the non-strategic air forces by 1996. Gorbachev was removed from power in 1991 and in 1993 Russia changed its policy with respect use of to its nuclear weapons. If you’re not sure what their policy is today, call and check-Phone: +7-095-408-6381 Fax: +7-095-408-4477. Sorry, I don’t have the e-mail address. But, the foregoing is quite true.

◦

“Are you going to help me fellas?” Gary asked.

“Gee, I don’t know, Gary, I can’t shoot 600-yards,” Ron replied.

“I wasn’t going to use a rifle, Ron,” Gary replied. “And we can’t use a bomb because that would cause collateral damage. How about we use AT-4’s on their cars?”

“It’s a shame that Terry got killed,” Clarence said. “This would be right up his alley.”

“We don’t have Terry so we’ll have to do it ourselves,” Gary said. “But, we can blame it on the Russians.”

“How are we going to do that?” Clarence asked.

“We’ll use RPG-7’s,” Gary replied. “Or maybe RPG-18’s or the RPG-22’s.”

“Don’t be stupid, partner, where would we get those?” Ron gaffed. “Tell me one thing we have that the Russians don’t have, for a dollar.”

“Sure don’t get much for your money these days,” Gary bitched. “Here’s the buck, what do we have on hand that the Russians use?”

“The fellas have some M3 MAAWS,” Ron pointed out, “And the Russians use the Carl Gustaf Rifle and 84mm ammunition same as we do. That’s the beauty of the system, dozens of countries use it as same as the RPG-7. Only this way, you won’t stir up anything with the Russians and make them go nuke.”

“You don’t have a problem with me taking out Teddy, Chuckie and Hillary?” Gary asked.

“If you don’t, partner, that bimbo will probably ending up being the first lady President,” Ron replied.

“Hey, I’ll help too,” Clarence suddenly offered.

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Monday, November 12, 2007... Year 3, Day 22 PT... Day 752 PT...

This just in from California, the announcer droned. Terrorists were responsible today for using recoilless rifles against seven Senators who were starting their tour of US cities in support of the bill that Senators Kennedy and Clinton introduced in the Senate only last week. Police have no clue as to the possible identities of the terrorists. Informed sources tell CNN that without the support of the seven Senators the bill will probably not achieve passage. In other news, the Russian Federation is still holding fast within its borders. The United States and Germany have fully deployed their troops to eastern Germany. British and Canadian forces are moving to join them and are expected to arrive on scene within the next 24 hours. The French are still debating the issue in Parliament with discussion continuing in the Senat and Assemblée Nationale. President

Jacques Chirac issued a statement indicating that they hoped to have a decision by early next year as to whether or not the French would enter into the defense of Europe. Some critics have suggested that the allies would be better off if they didn't, so surrender talks could be avoided with the Russians.

France has more holidays than any other nation in the world. Among its 361 national holidays are 197 saints' days, 37 National Liberation Days, 16 Declaration of Republic Days, 54 Return of Charles de Gaulle in Triumph as if he Won the War Single-Handed Days, 18 Napoleon Sent into Exile Days, 17 Napoleon Called Back from Exile Days, and 112 France is Great and the Rest of the World is Rubbish Days. Other important holidays are National Nuclear Bomb Day (January 12), the Feast of St. Brigitte Bardot Day (March 1), and National Guillotine Day (November 12).

France has a population of 54 million people, most of whom drink and smoke a great deal, drive like lunatics, are dangerously oversexed, and have no concept of standing patiently in line. The French people are in general gloomy, temperamental, proud, arrogant, aloof, and undisciplined; and those are their good points. Most French citizens are Roman Catholic, though you would hardly guess it from their behavior. Many people are communists, and topless sunbathing is common. Men sometimes have girls' names like Marie, and they kiss each other when they hand out medals. American travelers are advised to travel in groups and to wear baseball caps and colorful trousers for easier mutual recognition.

In general, France is a safe destination, though travelers are advised that, from time to time, it is invaded by Germany. By tradition, the French surrender more or less at once and, apart from a temporary shortage of Scotch whisky and increased difficulty in getting baseball scores and stock market prices, life for the visitor generally goes on much as before. A tunnel connecting France to Britain beneath the English Channel has been opened in recent years to make it easier for the Government to flee to London.

"Are the Russians surrendering?" Clarence asked.

"I think maybe he was talking about the French, Clarence," Gary chuckled.

"Maybe we should help the French to decide," Ron suggested.

"What did you have in mind, Ronald?" Gary asked.

"Well, since they can't get together in the Parlement of theirs," Ron said, "Maybe it's because they need some soap. We could send them a shipload or two."

"It won't help Ron," Clarence pointed out. "Those Germans have strong stomachs."

"I was thinking about the Russians," Ron retorted.

“They have to go through the American Army Ron; the French are safe as long as they have a skirt to hide behind or for the men to wear it.” Clarence continued.

“What makes you think the men wear skirts, Clarence?” Gary asked.

“Well, if I was a man and my name was Marie, what else would I wear?” Clarence asked back.

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“The word is that they may be lowering the Threat Level to Orange,” Sergeant said.

“Why would they do that, Sergeant, have they found the terrorists?” Jack asked.

“No, but they have 93% compliance with people getting NIC’s and submitting their biometric data,” Sergeant explained. “I think it was all a ruse.”

“Speaking of terrorists, I wonder who killed those Senators?” Jack asked.

“I don’t know for sure Jack, but I think we’re missing 2 of those 84mm HE rounds,” Sergeant replied.

“They are probably in one of the other armories, Sergeant,” Jack suggested.

Re: Silver Star story-actually happened. The guy got an ass chewing instead of a Silver Star. Derek idolizes the guy. It will probably get Derek killed some day. The Aurora aircraft doesn’t exist; that’s why I was acquainted with the manager in charge of the project at the Skunk Works. It was the cover name for the B-2 bomber project.

Big John – Chapter 29 – Over Here

Same day... Liberty Village...

When Jack got home from work that night he spent a couple of hours checking the M3 inventory, especially the number of rockets. Everything was accounted for and nothing was missing. One case was short a couple of rounds, but another was long by the same amount. Everything seemed all right so he said to hell with it and went home to Moira and the kids. To tell the truth, he half suspected that The Three Amigos had been the terrorists who’d taken out those 2 limos. They said that they driven up to Palmdale to check on their friends. And they had, on their way back from Los Angeles. They even had a receipt for repairing a flat tire to explain their delay in getting to Palmdale, no spare, you know.

The Three Amigos didn’t have any of the M3 MAAWS, but one of the things under their beds had been the SMAW MK 153’s. Modern version of the good old bazooka. It was

only 1mm different in bore than the M3 at 83mm; hard to tell the difference between the two on initial inspection of where the rounds had hit. One thing had led to another in their conversation and they'd decided to go to LA to watch those Commie Senators speak against their rights. Never got a change to hear them either, because someone had blown up their cars on the way to the gathering. Darn shame, you know... 600-yards...

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Tuesday, November 13, 2007... Year 3, Day 23 PT... Day 753 PT...

Russian forces withdrew approximately 50km today within their borders, the announcer reported. The move is seen by many as the first step in a gradual reduction of their forces and a de-escalation of the looming conflict. The White House declined comment, but there was speculation that British, Canadian and American forces would mirror the Russian withdrawal. In other news, the weather continues to improve in the western part of the country. The National Weather Service hasn't indicated whether the change is temporary or a more permanent nature.

The bodies of the 7 Senators were returned to Washington overnight on Air Force One. Authorities on the scene say they have no clues as to who could have done the assassination. Several 2nd Amendment advocate groups have been questioned, but apparently everyone questioned has accounted for his or her time when the assassination occurred. With the return of the Internet and telephone service, the government reports the highest single day volume on the Internet in history. The government was able to accomplish restoring phone and Internet service by bringing all service providers into a quasi-governmental corporation, Central Communications.

"I don't care how they did it," Gary responded. "All I know is that my Frugal Squirrel website is back up. I can't figure out why the FAS and Global Security websites haven't been brought up though. Probably because they have the Field Manuals on all of the weapons people borrowed from the armories."

"We didn't borrow those weapons, Gary," Ron laughed. "Borrow implies we intended to return them. Are you going to turn in everything you have?"

"I most certainly would, if I had anything, Ronald," Gary snickered. "But we're part of the militia and we need the arms we don't have."

"It looks like it might snow," Clarence said as he entered the community building.

"It can't snow," Gary snapped. "The NPR just said that the weather was improving."

"Don't kill the messenger, Gary," Clarence replied. "I'm just telling you what the sky looks like. The wind is picking up too."

◦

“I checked the inventory of the MAAWS gear last night Sergeant,” Jack said. “We aren’t missing anything, there were just some things misplaced.”

“It appears that a storm front is moving in and the war front is moving out,” Sergeant replied. “I want Marty and you to cover the area down around Banning and Palm Springs for the remainder of the week. There have been some reports of trouble down there.”

“What kind of trouble?” Jack asked.

“Someone has been sneaking in at night and stealing wind turbines,” Sergeant explained.

“How can someone sneak in and do that?” Jack asked. “It would be a major operation to take down one of those turbines.”

“Then Marty and you shouldn’t have any trouble catching whoever is doing it,” Sergeant replied.

“What do you want us to do with them when we catch them?” Jack asked.

“If they’re stealing them for their own use, tell them to steal the turbines from Tehachapi,” Sergeant suggested. “That’s not our jurisdiction.”

“Neither is Banning or Palm Springs. What are they doing with those roadblocks back on I-10?” Jack asked.

“Same stuff, different day,” Sergeant replied. “I heard around that they’re going to go to fuel rationing and maybe even travel permits, tied to your NIC, of course. Heard something else, too. It seems that the Department of Homeland Security is offering to help organize the local militias. What do you suppose that that might mean?”

“If they did that, Sergeant, they’d have a list of members and a pretty good idea who had what for weapons, wouldn’t they?” Jack asked rhetorically. “I think that we’d better exclude our little group up on the mountain from accepting any of that assistance. What they don’t know won’t hurt us.”

The cabin was now getting electricity almost exclusively from their solar panels. The batteries seemed, most days, to carry enough stored charge to tide them over if the sun didn’t shine. On those few days that they needed additional electricity, they were running the generators, but it seemed that they were wasting fuel. What they really needed at the cabin was another alternative source of energy because they were making a dent in their fuel supplies.

◦

The Three Amigos had their own DEWS line (Dog Early Warning System) in their cabins. Every time anyone even so much as walked by their cabins, Gary's dogs, Missy, Baby and Scrappy would set up quite a row. Even if two of the dogs were sleeping, the third one always seemed to be awake. Ron had 3 dogs and two cats and Clarence had 2 dogs. At night, Missy would sleep with Sharon, Baby, a German Shorthair mix, would sleep with Gary and Scrappy, a Terrier mix, would sleep in the doorway of Gary's bedroom office, guarding his computer. Ron had a German Shepherd and a pair of Shelties and Clarence a pair of Rottweiler's.

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"Man, I'll be glad when this shift is over," Marty said. "I'm having trouble staying awake."

"We'll probably have to stay until dawn if we want to catch these people, Marty," Jack replied. "Have some more coffee."

"My eyeballs are already floating Ja... Hey look over there," Marty said.

A semi tractor-trailer rig had pulled in next to a tower that was shut down. The trailer already had at least two of the wind turbines on board. Marty started the Bronco and eased their way over to where the semi was parked. There was a crew of men preparing to dismantle another tower. Marty and Jack got out and shined their flashlights on the group from the safety of their vehicle. One quick pass of the lights revealed that only 2 of the men were armed. The others were wearing tool belts.

"San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, freeze," Marty called out.

One of the two guards whipped up his AK-47 and let off a short burst in their general direction, aiming for the flashlights. Marty yelled out, "I'm hit," and Jack double tapped the shooter with his Glock model 20. Jack moved around behind the vehicle to check on Marty, all the while keeping the other armed man covered.

"Drop the rifle, mister," Jack commanded. The man complied, looking at the dead man on the ground.

"How bad are you hit, Marty?" Jack asked.

"I'll live, Jack, it's just a graze," Marty replied.

"One of you men get over here and help to put on this field dressing," Jack yelled. He picked up the radio and called Sergeant.

"Sergeant, we got them, but Marty is slightly wounded," Jack reported.

"What do you have Jack?" Sergeant inquired.

“Tractor trailer rig and a crew of about a dozen,” Jack replied. “One of their men fired in our general direction and winged Marty. It looks like they have a couple of wind turbines on the trailer already.”

“10-4, Jack,” Sergeant replied. “I’ll get Steve and we’ll be there in 30 minutes. Don’t do anything else except to keep them covered. All further communications should be on Tactical-2.”

‘Tactical-2’ was a code that told Jack that future communications would be on their 2-meter radios on a preset frequency. TAC-2 would have been the police radio tactical frequency. Even another officer might not notice the minor variation in the instruction. Jack got all of the men on the ground and when Marty was bandaged, Marty collected the 2 weapons. There were more in their pickups and the cab of the semi. Sergeant and Steve pulled in around a half hour later, siren wailing and lights flashing. No further communications had been necessary. You do know why cops hold their flashlights the way they do, don’t you?

“Let’s look at that wound, partner,” Steve said carrying his med kit to Marty.

“Jack, you’re on me,” Sergeant instructed. “Who shot Marty?”

“That’s him on the ground,” Jack pointed out.

“Who’s in charge here?” Sergeant asked the men.

“I guess that would be me,” one of the men answered.

“Why did your man fire on my men?” Sergeant asked.

“I guess he must have been startled,” the man replied. “Is your man ok?”

“Steve how is Marty?” Sergeant called out.

“Grazed his thigh, Sergeant, no big deal,” Steve responded.

“All we were going to do was tell you to move on,” Jack growled.

“Jack, I think that we’ll have to impound their booty,” Sergeant said. “You fellas have a complete setup on that trailer?”

“We have the controller and all of the equipment,” the leader replied. “We always get that first.”

“Here’s the deal,” Sergeant said. “You follow us with that tractor-trailer rig and we’ll lead you to the Sheriff’s mountain storage yard. You can unload everything and be on your

way. The man that shot the Deputy paid for his foolishness. Things are different now and I can understand why things happened the way they did. If you fellas want to continue stealing wind turbines, you're going to have to do it outside of our jurisdiction. Say someplace like Tehachapi. Or, if you'd rather, we can arrest you and put you in the slam. Aren't any courts running yet, so you might be in the lockup for a very long time."

Given the alternatives, the leader decided to take Sergeant up on his offer. The wind turbines turned out to be 350kw units. With Sergeant in the lead and Jack bringing up the rear, they escorted the tractor-trailer rig to Liberty Village where the trailer was unloaded. The men turned out to be a group of survivalists from Arizona that were building a survival community of their own. The leader was given a California map and told to stay out of San Bernardino County in the future. Sergeant was most emphatic about what would happen if ever he saw their faces again.

Wednesday, November 14, 2007... Year 3, Day 24 PT... Day 754 PT...

"I don't care how you do it Randy, but you get those two wind turbines installed and operating," Sergeant 'suggested'.

"We're going to need a load of concrete to build the base and an electrician to wire them up," Randy replied.

"You know where to get concrete and we'll find an electrician who is familiar with the systems to hook up the wiring, Randy," Sergeant replied. "Install the control equipment in the shelter."

"I can wire up the wind turbines, Sergeant," John Hewlett announced.

"Ok, John, do you have everything you need?" Sergeant asked.

"If you have wire in the storage building, I'm all set," John replied.

"More than you'll ever need," Jack replied. "How long do you figure this will take, Randy?"

"Only until the concrete sets up, Jack," Randy responded. "We'll assemble the turbines on the ground and use the crane to set them in place. With the accelerator in the concrete, maybe by the first of the week."

"I'll call the Sheriff and tell him that the wind turbine theft problem is solved," Sergeant said. "You guys turn in and get some sleep and we'll head out tomorrow to finish our shifts for the week."

Thursday, November 15, 2007... Year 3, Day 25 PT... Day 755 PT...

“The Sheriff said to take the rest of the week off because he can’t pay for overtime,” Sergeant announced.

“I ended up using 2 loads of concrete for the footings and bases,” Randy explained. “I got those completed yesterday. I didn’t bother to screw around with any building permits, but everything I put in was to code and I took pictures of the process, just in case. We already have the battery backup systems for the solar power so we’re just losing the extra power. I could use extra help assembling the towers.”

“I guess that we might as well help since we have the remainder of the week off,” Jack offered. “Maybe we should talk to Edison and see about offering to supply them power.”

“No,” Sergeant said, “They’d want to see the equipment and want to know where we got it from.”

“Where did you get the equipment?” Gary asked horning in on the conversation.

“It came off a trailer,” Sergeant replied. “We caught some guys stealing wind turbines and stopped them and impounded the equipment that they had in their possession. It won’t do anyone any good sitting in an impound yard, so here it is.”

“What happened to the thieves?” Gary asked.

“Uh, they escaped,” Jack replied. “Right after they got done unloading their trailer.”

“You guys had better get everything covered up,” Clarence announced, “It’s starting to snow.”

“There goes the ballgame,” Randy said. “We’ll just have to wait for the new snow to melt off before we can assemble the turbines and mount them. Plus, we still have to get the trencher and put in the wiring.”

“It’s not snowing very hard, Randy, why don’t we see how far we can get on assembling the turbines before we have to stop?” Jack asked.

As it turned out, the snowfall amounted to little more than a snow shower and by the end of the day they had the two turbines completely assembled and ready to lift into place whenever the concrete was ready. Jose had dozed off a place for a trench for the wiring and Manny had used the trencher to cut the trench. John Packard was down in the shelter completing the setup of the control panels and equipment. Bob Pelham and some others had put in the electrical lines and refilled the trench when they were done. All that remained was to connect the wiring and erect the towers at the end of the day.

Friday, November 16, 2007... Year 3, Day 26 PT... Day 756 PT...

John finished off the wiring in the shelter and mounted boxes on the bases of the towers. The wiring was complete except from the generators on the towers to the terminal boxes. They had used 3" schedule 40 drainpipe for a conduit for the wires. Randy determined that he could probably mount the towers on Tuesday if it didn't snow again. CNN didn't say anything about the weather, but they did have news from Europe.

Russian forces continued their withdrawal today essentially ending the stalemate that arose when President Bush sent troops to Europe. British forces have continued their withdrawal and only a few elements remain on the continent. US forces have begun a massive airlift to return the troops and equipment to the US. Armored forces that were only partly unloaded are now being reloaded aboard the ships in German ports. Senate Minority Whip, Dick Durbin of Illinois, called for an investigation of President Bush's handling of 'this entire affair', suggesting that the President may have pushed the Russians into a 'near catastrophe' for purely political reasons. Republican leaders dismissed Durbin's claim stating for the record that it only the President's foresight and aggressive actions that prevented the conflict from escalating into another world war. The French Parlement announced that in view of the improving situation, talks relating to whether or not France would participate in the allied action were moot and Parlement was discontinuing its discussions. The Department of Homeland Security reduced the Threat Level to Blue.

Scores were arrested in eastern states for refusal to display their National Identity Cards when requested to do so by federal authorities at the security roadblocks. As you are aware, the Department of Homeland Security implemented the roadblocks in response to the increase in the Threat Level. There has been no indication when the roadblocks will be removed, although sources close to the Administration indicated that they may remain in place until 100% of the population has complied with getting NIC's and/or has submitted the additional biometric data.

State funerals were held today for the seven Senators killed in Los Angeles on Monday. Authorities indicate that they are no closer to finding the group responsible for the cowardly attacks. ATF agents disclosed that the weapons used in the attacks weren't the 84mm recoilless rifles as first thought but the slightly smaller Mark 153's 83mm weapons used exclusively by the Marine Corps. Widespread looting occurred at the Marine Corp facility at Barstow, California and authorities are at a loss to explain who might have committed the act. However, some sources feel that the attacks were directly tied to the bill introduced by Senator Kennedy and later endorsed by Senator Clinton."

"That doesn't make a lot of sense," Marty said to Jack. "What harm can there be in a few people not having NIC's? The next thing you know, some computer whiz will figure out how to program the Smart Cards with phony information and get rich selling them on the street."

"Let us know when they start turning up, Marty," Gary said. "It never hurts to have a few extra sets of identification."

“What would you old guys know about phony ID’s,” Jack asked.

“Oh not much, do you want us to be US Deputy Marshals, LAPD or LA County Deputies?” Ron asked.

“And, we have paperwork to back them all up,” Clarence smiled.

“They’re just phony badges,” Sergeant scoffed.

“Real badges, but phony ID’s,” Gary replied.

“How did you guys ever manage that?” Sergeant was amazed.

“Did I ever tell you about our friend Marshal Marshall Thomas?” Gary asked.

“Shut up big mouth,” Ron hissed.

“Never mind, Sergeant, I’ll tell you later,” Gary changed his tune.

Saturday, November 17, 2007... Year 3, Day 27 PT... Day 757 PT...

This concrete set up faster than I thought,” Randy said. “I must have used too much accelerator. Let’s get the wind turbines up and get John to hook up the wiring.”

“Can you use the concrete this fast?” Jack inquired.

“I used a High Early hot-water concrete with an accelerator and the fiberglass admixture, Jack,” Randy explained. “I could have set the towers after 7 hours, but it never hurts to let it cure a while longer. That’s especially true with how cold it is. It’s good to go but we’ll leave the forms in place.”

With the crane to set the towers, they were done by noon and the wiring was connected shortly thereafter. They would only have to run the diesel generators in an extreme emergency like the sun not shining for several days and the wind not blowing. They could use a load of diesel fuel, however, and propane if they could get it. Therein lay a problem. Their previous source of fuel at the distributors had been seized by the DHS for the ‘National Emergency’. If the troops were coming home, they reasoned, the emergency was over. Bush had promised to release stores from the Strategic Reserve anyway and they really could use 9,000-gallons of propane and 32,000-gallons of diesel, give or take.

In the end, that’s what it came down to, taking. FEMA was part of DHS and they had their black shirts guarding the terminal. Had, as in formerly. They were still there, but the weapons had grown in weight to the point that they could no longer lift their arms. Maybe the 7.62x51mm caliber bullets in the foreheads had something to do with their fa-

tigue, but who could tell. They were for sure, dead to the world. Nice H&K MP-5Ns they were carrying too. The Three Amigos would get a kick out of those. They also took the DHS/FEMA ID materials for The Three Amigos to reproduce.

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Sunday, November 18, 2007... Year 3, Day 28 PT... Day 758 PT...

"Thanks Jack," Gary said, "Did you get the badges?"

"We only got 6 of them, but we got their ID's," Jack replied.

"What else did you get?" Ron asked.

"We got you some H&K MP-5N's," Marty said.

"We appreciate the offer, but we already have some of those in the special .45 caliber version," Clarence said.

"We'll take them anyway," Gary cut Clarence off. "Clarence, we can use these for shooting sparrows. How many sets of ID do you want?"

"Run enough off for everybody," Jack suggested.

"We'll manufacture some duplicate badges if you leave us one," Ron suggested. "I don't know if you 4 law enforcement officers realize it but there is something screwy going on."

"What do you mean, Ron?" Sergeant asked.

"It goes way back to the beginning of the NIC thing," Ron explained. "The NIC's came about because of those terrorist attacks with the dirty bombs. Don't you find it strange that the whole FBI and Department of Homeland Security never caught anyone? Wasn't it peculiar how quickly the system was implemented? That was a few years' worth of computer work setting the whole system up. Maybe the FBI couldn't get their fancy computer program working because the best programmers were working on something else. Do you know how long it took them to get and classify my biometric data? Fifteen minutes, that's how long. How long did it take to do the DNA samples on OJ Simpson, months? And, they couldn't even do that right."

"What's your favorite movie, Ron," Jack laughed. "*Conspiracy Theory?*"

"1997, Mel Gibson and Julia Roberts," Gary said. "*A good conspiracy is unprovable. I mean, if you can prove it, it means they screwed up somewhere along the line.*"

“Yeah, yeah,” Sergeant laughed. “Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you.”

“Why thanks, Sergeant,” Ron said. “Your honor, the persecuted rest.”

“Uh, we’ll take sets of ID for the four of us and our families,” Jack said, “How are you guys fixed up on badges and things?”

“Badges, and ID’s are easy,” Gary replied. “If we had a supply of the blank NIC’s we could make those up to match the National ID Cards. If I could remember the name of that computer hacker I met back in 1984 that I based the Ritchie character on in my story called, *Have Gun Will Travel*, I think we could even hack their database and insert the false information into their system.”

“What about Passports?” Marty asked.

“Regular or Diplomatic, Marty?” Gary asked. “We don’t have too many of the Diplomatic blanks.”

“Diplomatic for us and regular for our families?” Marty half asked.

“No problem, what country?” Gary was narrowing it down.

“What do you have?” Sergeant asked.

“US, Canadian and British,” Gary smiled.

“Uh, what do you recommend?” Jack asked.

“A real US in your real name plus a second in a fictitious identity,” Gary suggested. “Plus a Canadian and a British in fictitious identities.”

“Well... ok,” Sergeant reluctantly agreed.

“Will these help?” Steve asked handing Gary a box.

“Where in the hell did you get these?” Gary asked opening the box. “They look like the genuine article.”

“They are, they ‘fell off a truck’,” Steve laughed.

“We have a hacker in the community down below, Marty said. “But I have no idea how good he is.”

“Track him down and send him to me,” Gary suggested. “I’ve got the perfect way to test him.”

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Monday, November 19, 2007... Year 3, Day 29 PT... Day 759 PT...

“Well, I’ll be darned,” Gary said when the hacker showed up the next day. “How long has it been?”

“1984 when I was working in San Francisco,” Robert Morse replied.

“What are you doing down here?” Gary asked.

“Got caught and fired,” Robert replied. “Maybe a dozen times until I changed my name and took a different approach. What do you need?”

“I need you to crack this list of computers and not get caught,” Gary replied.

“There’s only one on this list that I don’t have a backdoor into already,” Robert said.

Big John – Chapter 30 – Inspectors General

“All right,” Robert said, “I’ll go home and put a backdoor in the final computer system and as soon as it’s done, I’ll be back.”

“How long do you figure Robert?” Gary asked.

“A week ok?” Robert asked. “That one is tough to crack; I’ve already spent hours on it. What are you going to do once you’re in?”

“Add some identities and biometric data,” Gary replied honestly.

“I’ll have to do the input, Gary, do you have all of the application forms so I can scan them for their online archives?” Robert asked.

“I will by the time you get back,” Gary smiled.

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Wednesday, November 28, 2007... Year 3, Day 38 PT... Day 768 PT...

Robert returned early in the morning and he had finally hacked the computer in question. Hacking is breaking into a computer and cracking is doing something else illegal while you in the system. Robert proposed to input all of the data into a supplemental batch file and append it to the regular computer run that night. This allowed him to input the data into the appropriate batch file format and he only had to upload the data to each computer a single time. A second file of the scanned application records would also be uploaded when he uploaded the data into the batch files. He helped Gary and they photographed all of the residents with a digital camera and included the photos with the other biometric data, all of which came from their genuine NIC’s. He was done in a few hours and said he’d return the next day to verify everything took and correct anything that didn’t. The system wasn’t foolproof, far from it; if the agency involved stored the paper records, they would be missing from the files.

Thursday, November 29, 2007... Year 3, Day 39 PT... Day 769 PT...

“Hot diggity-dog.” Robert said, “It all went in on the first pass. Now for compensation, I’ll need some blank NIC’s and one of each of the badges and ID’s. You must have noticed that I added myself to all of the batches.”

“Everything you need is in the envelope, Robert,” Gary said. “Now you stay in touch, we may have some people to add, we have several empty cabins.”

“I’ll stay here if you can provide me with a cabin,” Robert suggested. “What kind of computer access do you have?”

"T-1," Gary replied.

"I have a set of T-3 equipment, would you rather have a T-3 Service?" Robert asked.
"No charge of course."

"For the equipment?" Gary inquired.

"No", Roberts said, "For the service, I'll own the equipment and you'll be billed for your regular T-1 line. T-3 is pretty much backbone stuff you know. That's what the ISP's use in many cases."

"What bandwidth are we talking about?" Gary wanted to know.

"45," Robert replied. "And I'll include free worldwide phone service."

"I'll talk to the people in charge when I issue the ID's," Gary replied. "Why don't you stay with Sharon and me for a few days?"

"Why not?" Robert replied.

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Saturday, December 1, 2007... Year 3, Day 41 PT... Day 771 PT...

"Ok Robert, you're in Cabin 9," Gary said. "It's fully furnished and you tell us what you need moved and we help you do it. If you wouldn't mind, we'd like to see your equipment in the communications room in the shelter."

"What shelter?" Robert asked.

"We have an underground shelter under the park," Gary explained.

"What park?" Robert wanted to know.

"Do you see that large area between here and the guard towers?" Gary asked.

"Guard Towers?" Robert seemed stunned. "I thought those were Forest Service watch-towers."

"Not exactly, no," Gary replied. "Remind me to issue you the standard issue of guns from the armory."

"As in bang, bang, you're dead type of guns?" Robert inquired.

"Are there any other kind?" Gary asked back.

"I'm a computer geek, not a soldier," Robert retorted.

"You are, depending upon which ID you're using, a US Deputy Marshal, a LAPD officer or a LA County Deputy Sheriff," Gary explained. "Plus I gave you the Diplomatic Passport so you're also a Statesman."

"I thought those were to get me through roadblocks," Robert replied.

"Of course they are Robert, but those 3 agencies now require their officers to be armed 24/7," Gary explained.

"Oh," Robert replied.

Robert went down below for his equipment and also came back with a gun safe. He took the weapons Gary gave him, locked them in the safe and they saw very little of him after. His idea of a weapon was a dual Xeon processor desktop computer. But he bathed and was neat and tidy so no one had any complaints. He'd gotten a whole lot more skillful since 1984 when he used an IBM PC and dialup modem to break into mainframe computers. Computer safeguards, he explained, were written by people to keep other people from invading their domains. But, if they made systems too secure, he asserted, it would both slow the system down and interfere with routine users.

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Friday, December 7, 2007... Year 3, Day 47 PT... Day 777 PT...

Washington, DC...

"What level of compliance do we have with the National Identity Cards?" he asked.

"98%, those roadblocks are really helping," the other man replied.

"What is the status of those that refuse to get the NIC's?" the first man asked.

"They're being put in camps, identified and issued NIC's."

"And after?"

"We hold them 30 days on minimal rations and then let them go."

"How much longer to full compliance?"

"We may never get 100%. Some of those survivalists can hold out for years on what they have stored. They seem to be the ones most opposed to the system anyway."

"What the best you're hoping for?"

“Say 99.9%. With 100 million people, that will still leave 100,000 unaccounted for.”

“That’s a lot of loose ends, try harder.”

◦

Although the terms militia and minutemen are sometimes used interchangeably today, in the 18th century there was a decided difference between the two. Militias were men in arms formed to protect their towns from foreign invasion and ravages of war. Minutemen were a small-handpicked elite force, which were required to be highly mobile and able to assemble quickly. Minutemen were selected from militia muster rolls by their commanding officers. Typically 25 years of age or younger, they were chosen for their enthusiasm, reliability, and physical strength. Usually about one quarter of the militia served as Minutemen, performing additional duties as such. The Minutemen were the first armed militia to arrive or await a battle. They were America’s first ‘Special Forces’.

The government stepped up its efforts today to bring all Americans in compliance with the requirement that they be issued National Identity Cards containing biometric data, the announcer began. Department of Homeland Security sources say that compliance has reached 98% and they hope to have the process completed in ‘the near future’. Roadblocks have been set up at key points and persons not in possession of the NIC’s were detained briefly while they were identified and their NIC’s issued. Officials dismissed claims by one individual that he was kept for 30 days on bread and water. The ongoing fuel crunch has forced the major airlines to shut down. President Bush announced today that the airline transportation system was critical to the nation and that the government would begin operating a national airline to insure that this need is met.

◦

I met a girl who sang the blues and I asked her for some happy news but she just smiled and turned away, I went down to the sacred store where I’d heard the music years before but the man there said the music wouldn’t play and in the streets the children screamed, the lovers cried, and the poets dreamed but not a word was spoken, the church bells all were broken and the three men I admire most, the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, they caught the last train for the coast, the day, the music, died, and they were singin...

Bye, bye Miss American Pie drove my Chevy to the levy but the levy was dry an them good ol’ boys were drinkin whiskey and rye singin this will be the day that I die, this will be the day that I die.

With the control of the airlines resting with a federal corporation, the announcer continued, the only form of public transportation not under direct control of the government is the bus line. During the 1940s the passenger train began fighting a battle against the airplane and private automobile. By the 1960s the passenger train was rarely consid-

ered as a means of travel. Schedules were erratic, trains were run down, and more often than not the journey was a miserable experience. Then, in October 1970, in an attempt to revive passenger rail service, congress passed the Rail Passenger Service Act. That Act created Amtrak, a private company that, on May 1, 1971, began managing a nation-wide rail system dedicated to passenger service. Critics say that the government moved too soon to take over air transportation. Supporters, conversely argue that the move was inevitable because the airline industry has been failing for years.

◦

“They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety,” Gary quoted Ben Franklin. “Ronald, I think you were right about those NIC’s. I think that we’re going to need to do something about this.”

“Right, Gar-Bear,” Ron scoffed. “I’ll be 67 on my next birthday, Clarence will be 66 and you’ll be 65. We’ll just grab our muskets and run off like a bunch of Minutemen. What made you change your mind?”

“I think I believe the story about that guy kept on bread and water for 30 days,” Gary replied. “Remember when you were talking to the Deputies about the NIC’s? I think you stumbled on to something.”

“Before we go running of half-cocked, we’d better talk to Jack and the others,” Clarence advised.

◦

Saturday, December 8, 2007... Year 3, Day 48 PT... Day 778 PT...

“All I can tell you fellas is that they set the roadblock back up and are manning it with their own troops, you know, the black shirts,” Jack said. “I’ve seen them arrest people for not having the proper credentials, but that’s all.”

“I may be able to tell you all a little more than that,” Steve opened up. “We were on a flight to an accident scene and over flew Cable airport on the county line. It’s been turned into some sort of camp. It’s all wired in with barbed wire fences.”

“Where’s it located?” Ron asked.

“2 miles NW of Upland. It’s situated right between highways 30 and 66 up against the LA County border,” Steve explained. “You ought to be able to see it from the center guard tower.”

“I suppose you’d have to know to look, wouldn’t you,” Gary said. “We’ll check the place out and let you know what we see.”

o

“There’s a lot of people in that place, Gar-Bear,” Ron said putting down the telescope.

“Let me see,” Clarence asked.

“Any idea how many, partner?” Gary asked.

“Could be several hundred stomping around there trying to stay warm,” Ron answered Gary.

“Ron’s right, there are a lot of people down there,” Clarence confirmed.

“How do you want to handle it?” Ron asked.

“Well, I guess it time for the FEMA inspectors to check on the camp,” Gary suggested. “Get on a business suit and grab your FEMA ID we made up. We’ll take one of the Hummers without a gun and do an official inspection. Bring those MP-5’s and the Beretta 92’s.”

o

Cable Airport near Upland...

“We’re agents of the office of the Inspector General,” Ron told the guard at the gate holding up his ID.

“Can I see the ID for the rest of you men?” the guard asked.

Gary in the back seat and Clarence behind the steering wheel, dug out their ID’s as well. Gary gave the guard a particularly nasty look.

“What can I do to help you, gentlemen,” the guard asked.

“Tell whoever is in charge of this 2-bit Concentration Camp that we want to talk to him or her,” Ron snapped. “We’ve had reports we have to check out.”

“If you’re armed, you’ll have to check your weapons,” the guard announced.

Ron turned around to Gary in the back seat. “You see what I mean, Mr. Wilson, they aren’t following any of the policies the Secretary set down.”

“I do see, Mr. Brown,” Gary replied. “They should have had that new directive several days ago. But we’ll give them our weapons and deal with this man later.”

“Our actions are governed under the 1978 Inspector General’s Act,” Ron explained to the guard. “And lately some people seem to forget that we not under the Homeland Security Act. That new directive outlined the change in the scope of our authority and clarified certain issues, like our legal power to retain our arms.”

“Oh, that memo,” the guard said. “The office is right there in the hanger.”

“You can go to Hell for lying, fellas,” Clarence reminded them.

“No you can’t Clarence or I’d have been there 40 years ago,” Ron laughed.

“Inspector General’s Office, we want to see the Camp Administrator,” Ron told the guard at the hanger door.

“Right this way, gentlemen,” the guard said and led them to an office. “Mrs. Benson, these men want to see Mr. Thompson.” She checked with Thompson and showed them into his office.

“What’s this all about?” Thompson asked.

“Thompson, we have information that indicates that your camp is using far too much food,” Gary said. “Would you care to explain?”

“We are not,” Thompson protested, “I’ll show you our records. The detainees only get 500 calories a day.”

Ron and Gary scanned the records to verify Thompson’s claim. Clarence never sat down and stood by the door, almost as if he were a guard.

“Someone up the line must be stealing food and charging it to your camp, Thompson,” Ron eventually said. “Give us copies of the records and we’ll clear your name and go after him.”

“Then everything is ok?” Thompson asked.

“Oh yeah,” Ron said, “Everything is perfect, Mr. Thompson. Mr. Wilson after you. Driver, let’s go.”

◦

Liberty Village 2 hours later...

“So you see, Sergeant, they’re only giving those people in the camps 500 calories a day to live on,” Ron explained.

“How did you get your hands on these types of records,” Sergeant asked.

“Accused them of wasting food and feeding the detainees too much,” Gary replied.

“What’s this other document?” Jack asked.

“Statistics on the detainees including average length of stay and calories per day,” Ron answered.

“Average length of stay, 32 days,” Jack read aloud. “Average calories per day, 496. Hell, this is better than the Adkins diet.”

“I wish that Derek were here instead of being in Germany,” Gary opined. “Someone is going to have to shut down that camp.”

“Well, I don’t have a tank anymore,” Derek said, “What do you expect me to do?”

“Derek!” Gary shouted, “When did you get back?”

“About 10 minutes ago,” Derek said. “They flew us stateside and in my case on to Ontario International. What’s going on?”

For the next hour or so they brought Derek up to speed, explaining how Homeland Security was detaining people for about 30 days for not having a NIC and starving them in the process. The longer they talked the madder Derek became. When he finally had the whole story, to the extent that they either knew or suspected what was going on, Derek all but exploded.

“You mean to tell me that while I was over in Germany risking my ass, a bunch of politicians were stealing peoples’ liberty?” Derek summarized.

“Not all of their liberties, Derek,” Ron pointed out. “Senator Kennedy introduced legislation to effectively repeal the 2nd Amendment.”

“And?” Derek asked.

“He and some other Senators came to California to stump for the new bill,” Ron continued. “Someone must have taken offense and they shot up the limos with Mk-153 83mm rockets.”

Derek and Gary exchanged a knowing look, but Derek said nothing. Sergeant, Jack, Marty and Steve caught the look, but also said nothing.

o

“You don’t suppose those old farts have been holding out on us, do you?” Jack asked rhetorically.

"If you ask them about it," Sergeant said, "They'll just go into one of those routines of theirs and avoid answering the question."

"You mean, 'Who's on First'?" Steve laughed.

"That or their imitation of the Three Stooges," Jack agreed.

"I didn't even know they owned suits," Marty said.

"They got the information," Sergeant said, "What are we going to do about it?"

"We're a tad short on people," Steve pointed out. "We still have Cabins 10, 11, 12, 13, 17 and 18 empty."

"You'd better think of Cabin 9 as empty too," Marty suggested. "That computer nerd is either hiding in the shelter or asleep in bed."

"Let's talk to Sheriff Penrod and see if there might be some other Deputies who'd be interested in moving to Liberty Village," Sergeant suggested.

o

Monday, December 10, 2007... Year 3, Day 50 PT... Day 780 PT...

San Bernardino Sheriff's Department... Central Station...

"What is this, a Committee?" Gary Penrod Asked.

"Sheriff, we have a couple of things we'd like to talk to you about," Steve replied. "First of all, we have some empty cabins up at Liberty Village. Do you know of anyone who is looking for someplace to live?"

"I might have a few people in mind," Penrod replied. "Any special qualifications?"

"Some," Steve replied. "Sheriff, what do you know about that FEMA camp over in Upland?"

"Not much, Steve," Penrod replied. "The feds have the lid clamped down on that place and I can't get near it. Why?"

"Take a look at these documents," Steve suggested.

A minute later, Penrod asked, "Where did you get these?"

"What's your opinion of those documents, Sheriff?" Jack asked.

"If they're true, someone is tromping all over the Constitution," Penrod replied.

"They're true," Sergeant said. "There were given to some of our people by the Camp Administrator."

"Thompson?" Penrod asked.

"That's the guy," Jack confirmed.

"What do these papers have to do with who you want to move to your empty cabins, Steve?" Penrod asked.

"We'd want people who were willing to do something about that situation," Jack answered for Steve.

"Count me in," Penrod said. "How many cabins do you have?"

"Six," Steve replied.

"I have the ideal six men, fellas," Penrod said. "I'll stay down here in the valley and be your eyes and ears down here. If you had seven cabins, I move up there myself."

"We have a computer guy who only spends enough time in his cabin to sleep, Sheriff," Steve replied. "Maybe we can get him to spend all of his time in the shelter and free up a cabin."

o

"So you see Robert," Gary explained. "It would make more sense for you to stay in the shelter near your computers and free up that cabin. You'll have the whole place to yourself. You can put your gun safe in the armory and not need to look at those guns again."

"What about meals?" Robert asked. "A man's got to eat."

"What do you usually eat?" Gary asked.

"TV dinners," Robert answered.

"There is a freezer full of TV dinners and a microwave in the kitchen," Ron pointed out.

"Will you guys move my stuff?" Robert asked.

"Consider it done," Gary replied.

o

“Ok guys, move his things to the shelter and his guns to the armory,” Ron told Jack and Steve. “You have your extra cabin. Who is it for?”

“Sheriff Penrod,” Steve replied.

“Put him up near you in Cabin 9 or 10,” Gary suggested. “We don’t need any Sheriff looking over our shoulders.”

“You really should move the remainder of that ordnance to the armory,” Jack suggested. “You could probably use the closet space. How many rockets do you have left for the Mk-153’s?”

“Enough,” Ron replied. “Can we keep the LAW’s rockets?”

“Yeah,” Clarence added, “They don’t take much space. When we get horses, we were planning on strapping 3 on top of our saddlebags.”

“Do you have saddle bags?” Jack asked.

“Nope. Gonna buy them when we buy the saddles,” Clarence replied. “Don’t have no horses neither. Gary’s afraid of horses. But, he’s rigged his wheelchair up to carry some LAW’s rockets.”

“What no pedestal mount for a machine gun?” Jack laughed.

“Don’t leave no room for his feet,” Clarence explained.

“I see,” Jack laughed.

Note: The music died on February 3, 1959, in a plane crash 5 miles north of Clear Lake, Iowa during a snowstorm.

Big John – Chapter 31 – One Day at a Time

The government made one tiny mistake, in the form of a faulty assumption. They assumed that everyone who had a NIC agreed with or at least accepted the system. The data stored on the NIC's was heavily encrypted using a 2048 bit encryption code. This level of encryption was high, but a 2-tiered 1024x1024 encryption would have been much more secure, albeit slower. Specifically, they could have had 2 dissimilar 1024 page sets of 1024 bit encryption tables and encrypted the data twice. The first or last bits of data could have indicated which table page in each set to use. It was deemed too unwieldy.

As a consequence, it didn't take all that long using a distributed network, e.g., several computers each working on a portion of the data for Robert to break the 2048 bit encryption. Especially since he has his own legitimate NIC to work from. A distributed network had been in use for some years on the Internet using free time on home computers to solve problems requiring massive numbers of computations.

The NIC system itself became increasing unwieldy with increasing compliance and increased usage of the system forcing the government to make substantial investments in additional computer system. And then one day someone planted a logic bomb on one of the government's computers and their house of cards came tumbling down for about 12 hours.

◦

Meanwhile...

Tuesday, December 18, 2007... Year 3, Day 58 PT... Day 788 PT...

A small party of 15 men attacked the FEMA camp in Upland, killing the camp staff and freeing the detainees. They took their time and issued the detainees the NIC's and other documents that camp had been holding. The camps records, which were only forwarded when a detainee was released, were destroyed. The records could be reconstructed but it couldn't happen overnight. Robert was kept busy altering the records of those released detainees and thereby covering their tracks. He did the changes in a single set of batch updates and then went back and erased his tracks.

In several locations in southern California, FEMA black shirts began to 'desert' their posts. Desert was defined in terms of them failing to show up for work one day. Now, that could either mean that they had run away or were unable to get to their posts because of some unforeseen delay or change in their disposition. But, Jose kept the hole filled with a layer of dirt so it aroused no suspicions. The news of the 'mass desertions' leaked to some of the media and they reported the story. This, in turn, saw more FEMA employees 'deserting' as militia groups figured out what was happening.

There are at least two ways to fight an enemy, openly or clandestinely. Guess which one is less risky? Especially if you have a large collection of weapons that hardly make a sound when they are discharged. The cabins were now all full and a couple of new items were stocked in massive quantities, rolls of plastic sheeting and duct tape. They didn't want to get any blood on the vehicles.

◦

"We seem to have a problem on the west coast," the man suggested. "I'm not willing to believe that we've had that many desertions. First that camp in Upland was overrun, the detainees released and the records destroyed. And now we're experiencing mass desertions? I don't believe that for a moment."

"You could be right, sir. There could be one or more groups operating in southern California and eliminating our people."

"Is there any way to get the military involved?"

"Not unless we can get Congress or the courts to overturn Posse Comitatus, no."

"Why not?"

"We'd come up several votes short in the House and the Senate."

"I see. Well, resupply the area and double the number of employees."

"Yes sir."

◦

Wednesday, January 2, 2008... Year 3, Day 73 PT... Day 803 PT...

"The more of them we help desert, the more of them that there seem to be," Jack observed.

"They're flooding the area with replacements on a 2 to 1 ratio," Penrod replied.

"I think it's time to change our approach," Steve suggested. "The costs of this operation must be staggering. We're only doing them a favor by reducing their staffs."

"At least they didn't reopen that camp," Penrod noted.

"We're encouraging people to comply with the law," Sergeant explained. "With the requirement that every sales transaction be subject to NIC screening, the delay time in processing retail transactions is up from 3 minutes on average to over 10 minutes on

average. We are encouraging people to shop around for bargains and it just further increases the number of transactions and further increases the delay.”

“Yeah, Robert suggested it and The Three Amigos supported it, suggesting that we improvise, adapt and overcome,” Jack said. “It’s something they picked up in a Clint Eastwood movie.”

“Were those LAW’s rockets strapped to the back of that powered wheelchair?” Penrod asked.

“Sheriff, they are slightly eccentric, but they’re a bunch of jokesters and they get things accomplished. It was those three guys that got the information on Thompson down at the FEMA camp,” Sergeant pointed out.

“I was thinking of expanding our operation out to Needles,” Penrod said.

“I agree with Steve, Sheriff,” Jack responded. “Let’s back off for a while and let the geezers do their thing. There’s a fair sized checkpoint in Mojave and they’ve been talking about working that area for a while. It may force FEMA to shift assets from here to there.”

o

“Do you and your group want to work over the people in Mojave for a while?” Jack asked.

“We’re working on a different approach right now,” Gary replied.

“For instance?” Jack asked.

“Well, the NIC is your ID card, debit card and credit card, right?” Gary asked.

“Yes, so?” Jack wanted more information.

“Robert is working on the banking segment of their system,” Gary explained. “He has a subroutine that will watch for certain account numbers and when they come up, authorize the transaction but pull the money from a government account instead of from the purchaser’s account. We did a couple test runs and it works like a charm. It transfers the money through several cutouts and erases the tracks as it goes. Slows down a transaction for about 90 seconds but you can buy a new car for cash with nothing in your bank account if your account is one of the numbers the system is watching for.”

“I don’t see how that will help,” Jack said.

“There weren’t that many blank cards in the box I gave you,” Steve pointed out.

“They really need to fix the door on that truck of theirs, Steve, they’re losing blank NIC’s left and right,” Gary laughed. “The original smarts cards had up to 1 kilobyte of RAM, 24 kilobytes of ROM, 16 kilobytes of programmable ROM, and an 8-bit microprocessor running at 5 MHz. It uses a serial interface and receives its power from external sources like a card reader. The processor uses a limited instruction set for applications such as cryptography. The ones they are using for the NIC’s have a much higher capacity, especially in the EPROM (erasable-programmable ROM) and the instruction set for cryptography.”

“I still don’t see what you can do,” Steve said.

“Screw up the NIC system,” Gary suggested. “This is even better than cracking it and will do some people some good. We think it will start to pull down the system from within.”

“I suppose it’s worth a try,” Jack admitted. “What is the downside?”

“The picture, for one,” Gary said. “And Robert will have to go along and program the cards and upload the data once we get home in the evenings. We’ll work around it.”

o

Thursday, January 3, 2008... Year 3, Day 74 PT... Day 804 PT...

After a day of distributing phony NIC’s, they returned to Liberty Village and uploaded the data. They expected that the Ford pickup dealer in Mojave would do a land office business the following day. There weren’t any grocery stores in Mojave, but the residents frequented Costco in Lancaster and Sam’s Club in Palmdale. How much do you spend in a Costco or a Sam’s Club? What if you had unlimited funds to spend? They told the people that they had 45 days to get all that they could get. After that, the cards would be disabled for their protection. If a problem arose earlier, they’d be notified in person.

Friday, January 4, 2008... Year 3, Day 75 PT... Day 805 PT...

“It’s working like a charm,” Robert reported. “The car dealers and grocery stores are getting hit especially hard. “Why would anyone need a boat in the desert in January?”

“In case there’s a heavy snow melt?” Clarence suggested.

“Fix me up one of those,” Ron told Robert. “I always wanted another boat.”

“You know anybody who sells horses and takes NIC’s?” Clarence asked.

“We could get cash advances from our debit accounts,” Gary suggested. “What kind of horse do you want to buy?”

"I don't care what kind it is, as long as yours is named Salina," Clarence laughed. "The 10th Calvary was mounted, we gotta get some horses."

Appaloosa breeders claim to have the oldest recognizable breed known to man - a claim backed by drawings of spotted horses in the prehistoric ice caves of France. Paso Fino breeders consider their breed to be the oldest breed in the Western Hemisphere. The ancestors of the Paso Fino came to the New World with Columbus on his second voyage from Spain. Paso Fino literally translated is "smooth gait". The Paso Fino horses were the preferred mounts of the Conquistadors. Some of their Fino horses also carried the spotted coat patterns of what is known as the Appaloosa today. As horses made their way North, the Nez Pierce Indians eventually claimed them. The Nez Pierce were one of the only tribes to practice selective breeding. They were very proud of their spotted horses and well pleased with what was known as the Indian Shuffle. The Indians could move their households quickly without undo jarring of belongings or rider.

Clarence couldn't find a Tennessee Walking Horse breeder but he did find a breeder who specialized in the Gaited Appaloosas. He pooled their cash advances from their phony NIC's and bought 6 horses and fitted saddles plus tack for all of the horses. Great idea, but it was poor planning. It wasn't like they had a lot of room at Liberty Village. A horse needs a little room to move around. And while there was lots of room on the other side of the fence, it was filled with mines. They found a rancher up by Phelan to board the horses. Life wasn't without its little complications. Gary didn't seem to mind boarding those horses up in Phelan at all. Since Clarence had bought the horses, you have to know the name of the horse he bought Gary, right? Well, it didn't really have a name until he bought it and it was a gelding, but Clarence didn't care.

o

Monday, January 14, 2008... Year 3, Day 85 PT... Day 815 PT...

"Nice day for a ride, Gary," Clarence said. "How's about we drive up to Phelan?"

"Is that horse you bought me broke to the sound of a gun?" Gary asked.

"Don't really know, Gary why?" Clarence asked.

"You don't know anything about horses, Clarence," Ron suggested, "That horse is a gelding. You must have named it Salina."

"Seemed like a good idea at the time," Clarence smiled.

"It's too cold to go riding anyway Clarence," Gary remarked. "Besides, I was planning on mounting a scabbard on my wheelchair today."

"Well, I could use a little action," Clarence insisted. "What do you want to do today?"

“Did you buy trailers for the horses?” Gary asked.

“No, they delivered them,” Clarence replied.

“Let’s go shopping, then,” Gary suggested.

The Three Amigos each ended up with an EquiSpirit 2-horse, dressing room trailer in XXL with most of the options. The dealer talked them into installing weight distribution bars to their long bed club cab pickups. You might just as well go first class when someone else is picking up the tab. They also stopped by a saddle shop and picked up a scabbard for Gary to mount on his wheelchair. Ron and Clarence decided they needed scooters so they bought scabbards too. The scooters were basically wheelchairs with a motorcycle type of steering gear and controls. They cost almost as much as that wheelchair of Gary’s. While they were at the dealer’s buying the scooters, they arranged for scooter lifts for the dressing rooms on the horse trailers. Gary wanted a scooter for his horse trailer too. Pretty fancy scooters, Bruno Supercub 46LE’s that went up to 6mph and with the optional pair of Group-22 batteries, had a range of up to 32 miles. They left the trailer at the Bruno dealer’s and went back for another scabbard for Gary.

o

“I’ve been talking to some of my contemporaries,” Penrod said. “It seems that some of them also have ‘special tactical units’. Homeland Security is offering a Seminar in Phoenix next week for officers from New Mexico, Arizona and southern California. I’m sending the 4 of you. This is a big deal with lots of faces so no one will notice if the 4 of you don’t mix in after hours. You’ll be getting together with the other fellas the 2nd night at the Lucky Break next to the Phoenix Civic Plaza.”

“Do we have some kind of a password or secret handshake?” Marty asked.

“Marty,” Sergeant said. “You’ve been around The Three Amigos too long.”

“What are they up to today?” Penrod asked.

“They said they were going shopping, Sheriff,” Jack replied.

“Don’t they have one of everything already?” Penrod asked.

“No, but I’m sure they will before those NIC’s expire,” Jack suggested.

Tuesday, January 15, 2008... Year 3, Day 86 PT... Day 816 PT...

The Three Amigos returned to the Bruno dealer to pick up their trailers and scooters. They also had to pick up scooters for Linda, Lucy and Sharon. The evening before, the Deputies had said something about going to Phoenix and Gary, Ron and Clarence talked it over and decided that Phoenix might be nice this time of year. So on the way

back to the cabin, they stopped and got 1-week travel permits to allow them to travel to Phoenix the following week. They put them on their real NIC's instead of one of the phonies. Robert put the travel permits on phony NIC's for them. Each travel permit permitted 2 people, them and their wife, and 2 horses to travel to Phoenix. (If a horse was going to Phoenix by himself, did he need a NIC?) The Deputies didn't need travel permits, military and law enforcement was exempt, as usual.

The White House announced today that it had reached a compromise with the Democratic minority in Congress, the FOX announcer reported. In a desperate last minute compromise to save his Social Security proposal, President Bush agreed to support and sign legislation introduced by the late Senator Ted Kennedy to severely regulate firearms. Senator Kennedy and 6 other Senators were killed in Los Angeles, California on November 12th last year when he and the other Senators flew to LA to begin a country wide tour in support of the legislation. In other news..."

"I hope the NRA is all over his butt," Gary said. "It won't do any good because he's a lame duck President, but how long has it been since I killed off a President?"

"When did you write your last story, Gar-Bear?" Ron laughed.

"Oh, yeah, huh?" Gary laughed too. "You don't suppose he's going to be in Phoenix next week do you?"

"After that announcement, he'll probably be afraid to leave the White House," Clarence suggested.

"How long does it say to charge the batteries on these scooters?" Gary continued.

"At least 12 hours, Gary," Clarence replied.

"Well I'm going to put the scabbard on my wheelchair and then on the scooter," Gary explained. "I have to figure out some sort of bracket for the front of the wheelchair."

Wednesday, January 16, 2008... Year 3, Day 87 PT... Day 817 PT...

Amid reports that a vocal segment of the population is angry enough with him to kill him, President Bush today dismissed calls that he withdraw his support of the bill introduced by the late Senator Kennedy that the White House announced yesterday, CNN announced. Bush says he still plans to go to Phoenix next week to address the Homeland Security Seminar for regional Law Enforcement Officers. Wayne LaPierre, Executive Vice-President of the NRA called for Bush to resign. The 80 lobbyists of the NRA's Institute for Legislative Action (ILA), established in 1975 to 'preserve the right of all law-abiding individuals to purchase, possess and use firearms for legitimate purposes as guaranteed by the Second Amendment to the US Constitution' are doing a full court press.

“No sir, I’m not going to do it,” Gary insisted. “I’m going to get through life just once without killing a President. Someone else will have to do it for us. I usually try to get Geraldo before I kill a President anyway.”

“Maybe we’ll get lucky and his plane will crash and burn on takeoff,” Ron voiced a prayerful thought.

“With our luck he’d crash on landing and slam into the motel we’re staying at,” Gary replied.

“Are we flying to Arizona?” Clarence asked. “I thought we was driving.”

“We are, Clarence, the travel permits for the horses aren’t good on airplanes.” Gary explained.

“Maybe we shouldn’t go,” Ron suggested. “If anything were to happen to Bush while he was in Phoenix when we were there, someone who reads your stories might turn us in for the reward.”

“I’m wearing my Paladin holster, just in case,” Gary said.

“Just in case what?” Ron asked.

“Just in case someone sees us and turns us in,” Gary replied.

“You’ll never be able to get within 500-yards of the guy,” Ron said.

“500 is less than 600, right?” Gary asked.

o

Tuesday, January 22, 2008... Year 3, Day 93 PT... Day 823 PT...

“Mr. President,” Gary called. “I’m Gary Olsen and I’m from Palmdale, are you ever going to answer my letter?”

Bush halted his Secret Service detail and walked over to The Three Amigos.

“You’re Gary Olsen?” Bush asked.

“Yeah,” Gary replied.

“Let me shake your hand, Olsen,” Bush said next. “I’ve never met a genuine crackpot before.”

“I don’t shake hands with traitors,” Gary snapped.

“Oh, why am I a traitor?” Bushed asked.

“I’m a Patron Member of the NRA,” Gary replied.

Bush leaned over and whispered into Gary’s good ear for nearly a minute.

“Really?” Gary said. “Ok, I’ll shake your hand.”

“What was that all about?” Ron asked.

“Ronald, do you know what a pocket veto is?” Gary laughed.

The real deal was that Bush would only ‘consider’ the legislation after his Social Security reform passed. He told Gary that the Senate would hold up the firearms bill until the last week of the session, and, he was going to be on the campaign trail as soon as he signed the Social Security bill. At best, Bush had an ardent supporter; at worst, he’d only prolonged the inevitable. But, martyrs get into Paradise right away, don’t they?

◦

Monday, January 28, 2008... Year 3, Day 99 PT... Day 829 PT...

“I already heard, fellas,” Penrod said. “You give a man a badge and a gun and he thinks he’s Wyatt Earp.”

“You’ll have to admit, it’s an interesting alternative,” Jack said.

“Interesting, yes, but can you pull it off?” Penrod asked.

“If Gary Olsen would shake George Bush’s hand,” Sergeant said, “Anything is possible. We’ll get that old camp cleaned up right away.”

◦

“I’m getting reports that someone has been tampering with the NIC system,” the man said.

“He didn’t leave enough of a trace to allow us to identify him.”

“What about the changes he made?”

“We can’t identify the transactions that occurred, but we stopped them.”

“We’re going to have to cover the missing money ourselves. How much did it turn out to be?”

“Only a few million, some in California and some in isolated locations around the country. We did get the NIC’s identified, but they seem to be phonies. We removed them from the system and set a flag if they get used again.”

◦

“Red Alert,” Robert announced. “Someone busted the stuff I had setup with the NIC’s. I’d guess they flagged the phony cards.”

“Notify your friends and we’ll drive to Mojave, and tell them to quit using the NIC’s,” Gary replied. “How did this happen?”

“I missed erasing one piece of code,” Robert replied.

“Nobody is perfect, except me,” Ron said. “How much did we get?”

“\$50 million, give or take,” Robert replied.

“Pretty good for only about 3 weeks,” Clarence smiled. “Did any of you talk to the guys when they got back from Phoenix?”

“Nah, they were huddled together all weekend, hatching out some plot,” Ron answered.

“You drive Ron, Clarence is too slow,” Gary suggested. “Did you overhear anything?”

“I think we blew it with the ice age thing, Gar-Bear, they stopped talking every time I was near,” Ron replied.

“Congress isn’t set to adjourn until October 3rd, this year,” Gary said. “That’s good, because with Bush on the campaign trail, and the election on November 4th, the Democrats can’t do much damage to the election. The new Republican candidate can honestly claim that he didn’t make the decision to pocket veto the bill. I wonder how long the Republican dynasty will last.”

“Probably until the votes are counted,” Ron said. “The Republicans were responsible for the NIC’s in the first place.”

“They might be responsible, but the bill had bipartisan support,” Gary pointed out.

*How many roads must a man walk down,
Before you can call him a man?
Yes, ‘n how many seas must a white dove sail,
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, ‘n how many times must a cannonball fly,
Before they forever are banned?*

*The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind,
The answer is blowing in the wind.*

*How many times must a man look up,
Before he can see the sky?
Yes, 'n how many ears must one man have,
Before you can hear people cry?
Yes, 'n how many deaths will it take, 'til he knows,
That too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind,
The answer is blowing in the wind.*

*How many years can a mountain exist,
Before it is washed to the sea?
Yes, 'n how many years can some people exist,
Before they're allowed to be free?
Yes, 'n how many times can a man turn his head,
Pretending, he just didn't see?
The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind,
The answer is blowing in the wind.*

Written by Bob Dylan in 10 minutes
Most popular version by Peter, Paul and Mary

o

“How would you 3 like a job?” Jack asked.

“Doing what?” Gary asked.

“Running one of those relocation camps,” Jack explained.

“Who’s getting locked up?” Ron asked.

“Those FEMA folks,” Steve replied.

“I’ll run the place, Gary can be the secretary and Clarence the Captain of the guards,” Ron perked up.

“Does that mean that I get to carry a purse, Ronald?” Gary asked.

Big John – Chapter 32 – Camp One

“We’re not going to do what they did, are we?” Ron guessed.

“Not at all, we want them on our side, not against us,” Jack replied. “We need soldiers willing to fight for the freedom of this country. There are just too many of them to kill.”

“I got dibs on the class on the Constitution and the UCMJ,” Gary said, “Ron can get Brenda to be his secretary.”

“Couldn’t find a purse to match your shoes, Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“We’re going to put Derek in charge of the physical conditioning and military training,” Jack continued. “We decided that the airport in Upland isn’t suitable for what we have in mind, so we’re going to set up a camp here in the mountains.”

◦

Wednesday, January 30, 2008... Year 3, Day 101 PT... Day 831 PT...

“This isn’t a very attractive place for a camp,” Ron complained.

“You fellas have your scooters and horses to get around so it won’t be too bad when the weather warms up,” Steve countered. “We’re going to pull in some of those temporary classrooms and use them for the barracks. We’ll also pull in a singlewide trailer for the administrative building.”

“What about feeding these people?” Ron asked.

“We sorted through the MRE’s we have available and took the good ones. You fellas can have the ones no one will eat to feed your trainees,” Sergeant explained.

“Any special ground rules?” Ron asked.

“One meal a day,” Steve said. “It’s about 2½ times the calories they were feeding the people in their camp, but those detainees weren’t doing anything physical. You give them one MRE a day, in the morning, and tell them to make it last for the day. That’s all they’re getting for tp and everything else. After 4 weeks of getting them into shape, you can start the classes.”

“What about punishment if we get someone like Private Owens (The DI)?” Ron asked.

“Extra duty, run them ragged. Your purpose is two-fold, fellas,” Sergeant said. “First, turn them into real soldiers ready to protect and defend the Constitution and second, make them proud to be Americans.”

“Any objection if we have a discipline barracks?” Ron asked.

“What did you have in mind?” Jack asked.

“We’ll have shakedown inspections every night and play them music to lull them to sleep,” Ron laughed. “Heavy metal some nights; the sound track from the Wizard of Oz or the Sound of Music on others; and, the worst of the Rap Crap on the rest, playing all night long. Don’t worry, a week or so of that and they fall into line.”

“Here’s your first truckload of trainees,” Marty said. “What do you want me to do with them?”

“We’ll get them to clearing the snow for places to park the trailer and barracks,” Ron suggested. “Does this place have a name?”

“Camp One,” Jack replied.

o

Monday, February 4, 2008... Year 3, Day 106 PT... Day 836 PT...

Every problem has a solution. In this case, it was those ankle transmitters that people on home detention have to wear. They knew where everyone was at all times. On their other ankle, the trainees wore one of those dog fence collars. They even let the trainees bury the wire. The collars were modified and gave one hell of a jolt when you got too close to the ‘fence’. Wearing the stuff on their ankles let them build their legs a little quicker, too. No system is perfect, that’s why they had a metal cage in the center of the compound. It wasn’t shaded and in the winter, really was a cooler and in the summer, hopefully a sweatbox. Each of the 3 states had one camp to begin with. Camp Two was in Arizona and Camp Three in New Mexico. They had an incentive system too, giving extra MRE’s for outstanding performance.

The US military wasn’t party to any of Homeland Security’s actions. They’d been called in a couple of times to back up FEMA, as I mentioned, but those were rare times indeed. No doubt the military encountered some of FEMA roadblocks but they were always waived right through. A situation that made many people wonder whose side the military was on. Whoever was orchestrating this attack on the American idea of freedom and liberty was pretty clever and was playing both ends against the middle. For those of us with some time in the service, the idea of carrying a federal ID card wasn’t completely foreign. Why don’t GI’s need passports? Because they have an ID card! Other countries around the world still required the Passports so that is why America still issued them in 2008. But not to GI’s.

Remember when they first brought out the new money with peach colored ink? How long did it take for someone to start passing counterfeit copies of the bills? Only a matter of hours! Those phony bills were good enough to fool a lot of people. Career crimi-

nals don't let a little thing like peach ink do anything more than inconvenience them. You take a stack of the new bills and examine them under a microscope and you find all of those little tattletales the government hides in the currency... The hardest part was getting the paper and inks anyway.

WASHINGTON, Oct. 10, 2000 – Over the next several years, DOD officials expect “smart cards” to replace the identification cards of all active duty military, Selected Reserve personnel, DOD civilian employees and eligible contractors.

DOD began issuing the cards this month, Pentagon officials announced Oct. 10. Personnel at the Pentagon and Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., will be among the first to receive the new card. The card will eventually allow physical access to secure areas, permit entry into DODs computer networks and serve as the authentication token for DODs computerized public key infrastructure, officials here said.

The Common Access Cards, as they're called, put DOD in the forefront of e-commerce and security, said Bernard Rostker, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. The cards feature barcoding, a magnetic strip and, for the first time, an embedded integrated circuit chip, he said.

How much more work had it been for the government to go to the NIC's once they had the military ID card system fully implemented? That DOD system involved over 23 million people. And with ol' Dubya spending 100 Billion a year plus in Iraq, it had been very easy to bury the costs of the NIC system development in the military budget. Take for instance, how much does ordnance really cost? (That's right; I make all of this stuff up because it's only fiction. Sorry, I forgot.)

o

Monday, February 11, 2008... Year 3, Day 113 PT... Day 843 PT...

FEMA and HSD weren't able to keep up replacing people as fast as they were losing them. They abandoned the roadblock program on February 4th because it had served its purpose of forcing compliance with the NIC System. That 0.1% of the population probably never would have NIC's; there are those people who simply refuse to conform. In the aftermath of WW III, nobody was certain who was who anyway. Add to that the fact that Robert was only about the 10th best hacker/cracker in the US anyway in 2008. What do they call that? Oh, yeah, a cottage industry.

o

“And they actually eat this stuff?” Ron asked Gary.

“Yeah, properly stored, it's good for years,” Gary replied.

“More like it lasts for years, it never could have been called good,” Ron chuckled.

“Shall we saddle up our scooters and check on the troops?” Gary suggested.

“It’s too cold outside,” Ron responded. “Did you figure out what you’re going to teach them in the classes?”

“Overview of the UCMJ and Constitution plus make them memorize the Bill of Rights,” Gary replied. “I think I may add my own interpretations on the 1st Amendment. Tell them that I personally think libel and slander ought to be capital crimes.”

“I know that you’re dying to remake the world into your own image of what’s right and wrong, Gar-Bear, but that’s the problem in the first place,” Ron said.

“Explain,” Gary replied.

“Someone or some group has been manipulating our system since I don’t know when,” Ron said. “Jack told me a little about Terry said he was eliminating some people who had developed some sort of bioweapon. Jack didn’t know if whoever was behind the bioweapon had it or not, or, he’s just not saying. Then, we had that so-called terrorist attack and the NIC’s came into play. That sure happened fast. Now you can’t really count that natural disaster into their plans, but why did we push the Chinese into launching World War III? The whole Russian thing was probably just a ploy to get everyone registered with the NIC’s. Someone is working the system, I tell you.”

“I know about that bioweapon, remember? You sound just like Tony and all of his baloney about the Trilateral Commission and the Round Table,” Gary said. “They both have websites, so what do they have to hide?”

“Terry worked for them,” Ron pointed out.

“I think maybe you watched ‘*Conspiracy Theory*’ one too many times, Ron,” Gary shrugged it off. “You act like someone or some group is trying to dominate the world. Is it aliens, partner?”

“The Soviet Union wanted to dominate the world and so did Hitler,” Ron asserted. “The Greeks, Romans and Persians all did at one time or another. So did Genghis Khan. You listed some of them yourself when you were talking about super powers. One more thing, partner, why did those Russians back down?”

“Maybe they didn’t want to end up like China, Ron,” Gary suggested. “What was it Gibson said about conspiracies in that movie?”

“I don’t know, it was you that quoted him,” Ron chuckled.

“I remember. *A good conspiracy is unprovable. I mean, if you can prove it, it means they screwed up somewhere along the line,*” Gary repeated.

o

Central Station...

"How are things going at Camp One?" Penrod asked.

"It couldn't be better," Sergeant laughed. "Those old guys have Derek running the FEMA people's butts off. They're feeding them around 1,200 calories a day and treating them like a bunch of Marine recruits. They plan to keep this up for about 3 more weeks and start reeducating them."

"That's a lot more food than they were feeding those detainees," Penrod observed.

"Not really, Sheriff," Jack said. "The detainees weren't running their butts off. We sorted through all the MRE's and gave them the stuff nobody likes, to feed the people we took up there."

"Will there be any sign we had the camp up there once the operation is finished?" the Sheriff asked.

"None. We'll move the temporary classrooms back to where we got them and the trailer back to the trailer park," Sergeant explained.

"Eventually, FEMA is going to get their black shirts back, but all of them in the three states will be on our side." Jack added.

"Or dead," Marty tossed in.

"That's right, or dead, Sheriff," Jack agreed.

o

"I think perhaps we underestimated this problem," the man said.

"We couldn't continue to force Homeland Security to keep those FEMA people deployed," his companion explained. "They were losing too many people."

"We don't have many things left that we can put into play, except for that virus."

"I'd really rather hold off employing that, it's a permanent solution to a temporary problem."

"Are all of our people immunized?"

“Yes and we’ve created stockpiles of the vaccine at several strategic locations around the world.”

“How long are they good for?”

“They’re frozen and should last indefinitely.”

“Where is the US stockpile stored?”

“At the lab in Hemet where the virus and vaccine were developed.”

“We can’t wait much longer, you know.”

“Give it 2 months and if our other avenues of approach don’t pan out, we’ll release the virus.”

“Do you have death estimates?”

“There’s bound to be some natural immunity, of course, but it should kill off 90% of the worlds’ non-immunized population in about 6 weeks.”

“3½ months will put us to when?”

“It’s February 11th. About May 26th, I suppose. Call it the first of June.”

◦

Camp One...

“Ron, look what I found,” Gary said handing Ron a slip of paper.

“What is it Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“Some kind of a map,” Gary said. “Terry must have taken out the stitching to the lining of my Paladin holster and slipped it in there.”

“Maybe we should ask Jack about it, what do you think?” Ron asked.

“He talked to Terry more than anyone else,” Gary said. “You know, that map is vaguely familiar, I think that’s down by Hemet. Sharon and I used to go through there on our way to San Diego back in the early 1990’s when Amy was in the hospital down in San Diego. But, I could be wrong.”

That evening at Liberty Village...

“Jack do you recognize this map?” Gary asked.

“Where did you get it, Gary?” Jack asked.

“It was sewn into the lining of my Paladin holster, Jack,” Gary explained. “The only thing I can think of is that Terry put it there.”

“Terry said something about a bioweapon lab in Hemet,” Jack replied. “Let me get a California map and we’ll check.”

“Hmm... I don’t see anything that matches,” Jack said handing the map to Gary.

“It’s right here Jack, on the I-215 junction with state route 74 west of Hemet,” Gary pointed. “Sharon and I used to go through that intersection quite often back in the early ‘90’s.”

“Terry said the lab had been destroyed,” Jack remembered aloud.

“Clarence and Derek can handle the camp for a day,” Gary said. “I think maybe Ron and I will go down there and check the place out.”

o

Tuesday, February 12, 2008... Year 3, Day 114 PT... Day 844 PT...

“That’s the route 94 exit right there Ron, get off here,” Gary suggested.

“What are we looking for Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“A medical laboratory that was supposedly destroyed, according to Terry,” Gary explained. “Ok, go east on 74 to the airport in Hemet and turn south on Warren Road when you get there.”

“Ok, we’re here, turn south you say?” Ron asked.

“Yep. Go down about 2 streets to Mustang Way and turn left,” Gary instructed.

“Ok, Mustang Way, now what?” Ron asked.

“Left on Fisher and take the second right after that,” Gary said.

“This is all residential,” Ron said.

“I see that, Ronald, I’m right here,” Gary chuckled.

“That’s the right turn, now which way?” Ron asked.

“Turn left,” Gary replied. “Stop, it’s that house right over there.”

“It looks deserted all right,” Ron said.

“Let’s take a look,” Gary suggested.

A jimmy popped the door and the door opened into a living room. Ron went back to the pickup and got a pair of flashlights. They looked around and couldn’t see any sign of a lab, but in the hall closet, the clothes bar had been removed. Gary pushed on the back wall of the closet and it turned out to be a spring-loaded door that opened to the basement stairway.

“You always have to have a secret passage or secret room, don’t you,” Ron laughed.

“There’s your lab, Ron,” Gary said shining his light around.

“I don’t see anything we can use,” Ron said.

“I hear something,” Gary said. “Listen.”

“It’s coming from over there,” Ron shined his light on an industrial type refrigerator.

“It’s locked,” Gary said, “Use the pry bar on it.”

“Are you sure you want to open this up?” Ron asked. “What if it’s full of a bioweapon?”

“It’s been nice to know you, open it up,” Gary chuckled.

The interior of the refrigerator proved to be a freezer, not a refrigerator. It was stacked with boxes labeled ‘Vaccine’. Gary and Ron pulled one of the cartons and opened it. Inside the lid were instructions for administration of the vaccine in terms of dose per kilogram of body weight. They put the box back in the freezer to keep it from thawing.

“Now what?” Ron asked.

“We might spoil it if we thaw it out, Ron, so I have no idea,” Gary replied. “I guess we look around town for a place that has ice chests and then try and find some dry ice.”

Liberty Village, late that evening...

“We have to get all of these boxes into freezers Jack,” Gary said.

“What’s in the boxes?” Jack asked.

“Some kind of vaccine,” Gary replied. “And instructions on how to administer it.”

“We’ll put it in the empty freezers and I’ll get Steve to check it out,” Jack suggested.

◦

“What exactly did Terry tell you about the bioweapon, Jack?” Steve asked.

“He described a video showing tests of the weapon on people and it sounded pretty ugly,” Jack replied.

“We need to contact the Sheriff and have him contact the CDC immediately,” Steve insisted. “According to the papers with the vaccine, it takes several days for the immunization to protect the body. We ought to think about vaccinating everyone in Liberty Village, just in case.”

“Isn’t that extremely risky?” Jack asked.

“All the documentation is here to support the vaccine being perfectly safe, but it must be used within 7 days of being thawed out and takes 2 weeks to get you to full immunity,” Steve explained.

“What about precautions and all of that medical stuff?” Jack asked.

“There are no precautions or counter indications for use of the vaccine,” Steve replied.

“Call the Sheriff,” Jack agreed.

◦

Wednesday, February 13, 2008... Year 3, Day 115 PT... Day 845 PT...

CDC Atlanta, Georgia...

The previous evening, immediately after getting a call from Sheriff Gary Penrod in San Bernardino County, California, the Director had commandeered a military aircraft and flown a viral disease specialist to Ontario International airport. CDC had verified destruction of the lab but had somehow missed locating and securing the vaccine. The minute the Director heard Hemet, lab and vaccine all in the same sentence, he’d called the White House and Bush had ordered an F-14 Tomcat to ferry the doctor to California. The Tomcat was a little faster than the F/A-18 Super Hornet and more readily available. The President also ordered 2 SR-71 aircraft in the NASA test fleet at Edwards AFB into standby mode. Tail number 64-17956, a SR-71B is operational and assigned to NASA Dryden FRC, Edwards AFB, CA, as is 64-17980, a SR-71A. Tail numbers 64-17967 and 64-17971 are also operational and assigned to Det 2, 9th SW, Edwards AFB, CA. Tail numbers 64-17968 and 64-17962 are in the Reserve Fleet, Plant 42, Palmdale, CA.

The vaccine was loaded aboard the SR-71's and 1½ hours later was in Atlanta. All except for two boxes, which were still in Steve's freezer. The doctor agreed with Steve's assessment of the vaccine and its safety. There were, in total, only 2 million doses of the vaccine flown to Atlanta. The CDC specialist estimated that even with the vaccine, it would take a month or two to develop and distribute 100 million doses.

o

Thursday, February 14, 2008... Year 3, Day 116 PT... Day 846 PT...

Steve had in his possession 10% of the available supply of the vaccine, but no means to reproduce it. He removed enough for the folks at Liberty Village and gave the remainder to Sheriff Penrod; thereby putting the burden on the Sheriff to make those 199,875 doses meet the needs of the roughly 5 million remaining citizens of California. Everyone in Liberty Village received their vaccination on Valentine's Day 2008. It only seems fair, after all. If old Gary weren't so darned curious no one would have any vaccine. The good news was that every box of vaccine contained a CD with every record there was pertaining to the development of the virus and the vaccine. It became a race against time. Tick... tick... tick... The information was right there on those discs, all they needed was time.

The latest method of producing vaccines came about because of complications in the current method of producing the flu vaccine. The newest method used reverse genetics and included the following steps:

1. Scientists make DNA versions of the RNA strands they want to end up in the seed strain.
2. The DNA copies are spliced into circular pieces of DNA called plasmids, which are inserted into mammalian cells growing in petri dishes. The plasmids keep the seed strain's genetic material from getting lost in the cells.
3. Genes in the plasmids instruct the cells to make new viruses, complete with the desired RNA strands and surface proteins.
4. The seed strain is given to vaccine manufacturers, who add it to millions of mammalian cells growing in large fermenters. The seed strain infects the cells and multiplies.
5. The mass produced strains are inactivated with chemicals and packaged for distribution.
6. Once injected, the seed strain cells force the white blood cells to begin a trial and error process of manufacturing the antibodies, which bind to the virus's surface proteins.

7. When a person is exposed to the virus, the immune system immediately produces the correct antibodies, which cap the proteins on the target virus's surface, blocking its ability to infect cells.

If you were under the mistaken presumption that the Manhattan Project was super-secret, man, you would be amazed at the secrecy surrounding the production of the vaccine. Nobody knew who was behind the production of the bioweapon. This was a 24/7 project and it was so secret there wasn't even a classification high enough to describe the level of secrecy. It took the CDC exactly two weeks to produce the seed virus and distribute it to the vaccine manufacturers. The manufacturers were told that it was a special vaccine for a special virus and that once the US had its 98 million doses to distribute the vaccine around the world.

During the process of arranging for distribution of the new vaccine to other countries, someone who should not have known about the vaccine got wind of the proposed distribution. This seemingly unimportant bit of information began to work its way up the chain of command. This wasn't the military where some officer could halt the flow of information; this was a civilian enterprise, one with layers and layers of bureaucracy. Those 98 million doses of vaccine made it to the US, but it had to be distributed, everyone vaccinated and two weeks pass.

No big deal, they knew where 99.9% of the population was because of the NIC's, leaving only approximately 100,000 people unidentified. It was a rather ironic turn of events. A mass media campaign was begun to notify the public about the vaccine. People without NIC's were urged to get their shots and in this one instance they wouldn't be required to produce a NIC. Some of the people ran the risk and came forward, got their shots and disappeared back into the woodwork. Some, however, were mistrustful of the system and refused to come forward. Location of these people and administration of the vaccine fell to the newly formed people's militias made up of former FEMA black shirts. Tick... tick... tick... it was just a matter of time.

Have you met Clifford Hanger? He sometimes goes by Cliff, you know.

Big John – Chapter 33 – But This Can't Happen Here

Dear Mr. Olsen,

You didn't do half bad for a crackpot. We looked around and found your letter so I'm taking a minute to answer it.

1. The rest of the world may not want Democracy, but in my opinion, it gives them the best chance of achieving freedom from hunger, disease and to have a voice in their own country. How is anyone to know what they want unless they're given the right of self-determination?

2. Your son enlisted in the Army and, according to our records, he enlisted in the Iowa National Guard. He has served this nation nobly. It is men like your son who keep this country free. Be proud of him, I am.

3. My obligation to this country is protect it from all enemies, foreign and domestic. China pushed the button and we responded the only way we could. China and Russia, for that matter, have provoked this country beyond endurance. I am sorry it came to what happened, but our response was measured in every way. Sometimes it works and, honestly, sometimes it doesn't.

4. The Social Security System will be totally broke in a few years. I said I was open to suggestions; do you have a better idea? I am trying to see that your children have money to retire on.

5. You were free to cast your vote as you saw fit. Millions of Americans died to ensure you that right. And, by the way, if you want to vote for the Democrat candidate, that is your privilege and right.

I may not have answered your questions to your satisfaction, but I tried. In my heart, I believe that you understand.

Sincerely,

DUBYA

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Tuesday, April 1, 2008... Year 3, Day 163 PT... Day 893 PT...

"I have received most distressing news," the man said. "They discovered our cache of vaccine in the lab in Hemet. They just received their shipment of vaccine and haven't had a chance to distribute it. We must act immediately."

"Yes sir, we'll release it today."

o

The Department of Homeland Security issued a warning today and raised the Threat Level to Red, the CNN announcer reported. An engineered virus was developed by parties as yet unknown, apparently intended for an attack on the United States. Two men in California discovered the vaccine that was developed to prevent the virus and since February 14th of this year, the CDC and vaccine manufacturers have worked around the clock to produce and distribute that vaccine. Sufficient supplies are now in the United States to vaccinate every man woman and child. Without the vaccine, the CDC has said that the virus is nearly always fatal. Some may decline to take the vaccine for religious reasons and a select few may have a natural immunity.

However, we have announced that everyone could get the vaccination without proof of identity by means of a National Identity Card. A group of former FEMA security personnel who were apparently captured by local militia groups in New Mexico, Arizona and southern California are attempting to reach anyone in their areas with the vaccine and distribute it no questions asked.

The implementation of the National Identity Cards was in response to the attack on the country by terrorists using dirty bombs. Last night the FBI arrested 41 members of a terrorist cell that has admitted responsibility for planting and exploding the dirty bombs on February 14, 2005 in several cities. A FBI spokesman would say only that the arrests came as a result of a 3-year long investigation. The White House also announced that President Bush would address the nation on TV and radio at 9pm this evening, Eastern Standard Time.

o

My fellow Americans, Bush began his address.

This nation faces the gravest crisis in its history. A group of citizens from various nations have conspired to attack this great country of ours, and indeed, the entire world, with a genetically engineered virus based on the Ebola virus. Our remaining fleet of 6 SR-71 aircraft is being used to distribute the vaccine to key distribution centers around the country. By tomorrow, we will be able to begin mass vaccinations of the entire population of this country.

I have issued an Executive Order temporarily suspending the National Identity Cards until Congress can revisit the issue. I believe that the National Identity Cards serve a legitimate purpose. However abuses by FEMA and operatives within the Department of Homeland Security have forced me to take this action. Earlier today I asked for and received the resignation of the Secretary Chertoff, Director of the Department of Homeland Security and dozens of members of that Department. I have directed that the FBI investigate this matter with the greatest urgency.

We have no reason to believe that these actions were the result of behavior of Middle Eastern or Muslim terrorists. I will therefore take no action until the FBI identifies and arrests those involved in this affair. I urge every man, woman and child to get their vaccinations immediately. The vaccine takes a few days to build the immunity in the body and I fully expect whoever is responsible for development of the virus to release it immediately, presuming they have not already done so.

Finally, I had an understanding with the Democrat minority in Congress to secure passage of my Social Security Reform Initiative. I now state, for the record, that I will not sign any firearms legislation aimed at restricting the 2nd Amendment. In 1956, Congress passed Federal Law 32 USC, Section 109. Twenty-one states now have State Defense Forces, while almost every other state is considering their creation. States with State Defense Forces include Alabama, Alaska, California, Indiana, Louisiana, George, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.

In view of the demands now being placed on the state Defense Forces and our recent experience with the People's Republic of China, I shall ask Congress to repeal all federal firearms laws and make all firearms laws the sole responsibility of the individual states pursuant to the 10th Amendment to our Constitution. I shall also ask Congress to further amend the Constitution to identify the Right to Keep and Bear Arms as an Individual Right.

Effective midnight April 3rd, I am placing this country under full martial law. A 24-hour curfew will be in place for a period of 7 days but not to exceed 30 days. I take this action to prevent the spread of the virus. In the event that an emergency forces you to leave your home for any reason, contact your nearest local law enforcement for assistance. I am asking that each community make arrangements to temporarily house its citizens that unforeseen circumstances force from their homes. Elements of the US military will assist local authorities only when requested to do so. Military corpsmen and medical personnel will commence door-to-door visits to administer immunizations to anyone unable for any reason to secure their vaccination due to long lines and the limited distribution of the vaccine. We have sufficient supplies on hand to immunize every person who chooses to be vaccinated.

Thank you and good night. God Bless America.

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“Ah hah!” Ron said, “Little Georgie was in bed with the Democrats.”

“At least he admitted it, Ron,” Clarence said.

“He wouldn’t be acting this way if he weren’t about to become a lame duck,” Gary claimed.

“He just did it to cut into my side business of selling phony NIC’s,” Robert asserted.

“Steve, what did the Sheriff do with the extra doses of vaccine you gave him?” Gary asked.

“Man, was he caught between a rock and a hard spot,” Steve explained. “He distributed it to the medical community and they vaccinated all of the care providers first. Next, they vaccinated the first responders, which included police, firemen and ambulance staffs. The remaining doses were used to vaccinate the elderly.”

What the President didn’t tell the public was what he intended to do to prevent the spread of the virus beyond the steps announced. All modes of public transportation were temporarily suspended. Ports and harbors were closed, as were all government offices. These steps were immediate and preceded the institution of martial law. The delay in implementing martial law was thought to be sufficient to permit a majority of the population to be vaccinated.

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Ebola is a powerful, highly contagious hemorrhagic fever caused by a strain of virus first identified due to outbreaks in Africa. This disease has devastating symptoms that include extensive internal and external bleeding, followed by death. There is no known effective treatment, and the means of contagious transmission is not fully understood. Marburg is a powerful hemorrhagic fever caused by a strain of virus first identified due to an outbreak in Marburg, Germany. This disease has symptoms similar to Ebola Fever, but has been (allegedly) weaponized for use as a bioweapon. Weaponized means to grow, genetically alter, physically modify or otherwise process microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc.) to increase the potency or otherwise improve the effectiveness for use as a weapon. This often involves developing strains that resist treatment, survive longer in storage, and are more efficient in causing disease or more devastating on those infected.

A biological weapon (bioweapon or bio-weapon) is a device, or the organic material in that device that uses microbial or parasitic infection (or toxins produced by living organisms) to intentionally cause disease as an instrument of war or terror. Biological weapons can be deployed in artillery shells, bombs, warheads, or small portable or human-borne packages. They can be used directly on combatants, civilians, water supplies, crops, stored food or farm animals. Many experts consider biological weapons to be the most potentially devastating of the weapons of mass destruction.

Human infection with African-derived strains often has occurred in caregivers, either family or medical, or in family members who have prepared dead relatives for burial. Late stages of Ebola are associated with the presence of very large numbers of virions in body fluids, tissues, and, especially, skin. Individuals who come in contact with patients infected with Ebola without proper barrier protection are at high risk of becoming infected.

The first recorded outbreak occurred in Yambuku, DRC in 1976, where 316 patients were infected. In the largest recorded urban outbreak to date (DRC, 1995; 318 cases), admission to a hospital acted to greatly amplify the frequency of transmission. The lack of proper barrier protection (gloves, fluid-resistant gowns, and proper sanitation) and the use and reuse of contaminated medical equipment, especially needles and syringes, resulted in rapid nosocomial spread of infection. Only after adequate barrier protection and alteration in burial rituals were implemented was the outbreak contained.

Unlike Asian-derived Ebola (i.e., the Reston strain traced to a Philippine supplier of primates), African-derived strains appear to be spread more often by direct contact than by the respiratory route. However, the Reston strain has repeatedly been demonstrated to spread among nonhuman primates and possibly from primates to humans via the respiratory route. Fortunately, although the Reston subtype has been documented to cause infection in humans, it does not appear to be pathogenic to humans.

◦

The hot issue became the protecting of America first and others second. Can you hear everyone around the world screaming their collective heads off? Ebola seems to spare children, thus the medical community vaccinated the elderly with the leftover vaccine available. Production of the vaccine was in full swing, thanks to a curious American. The lab in Hemet was but one of many that had worked on the virus as it later turned out. There were labs in every industrialized nation in the world and those same nations were now generating the vaccine in ever increasing quantities.

That wasn't really the main problem anyway. The problem was in distributing and administering the vaccine. Fortunately for the world, the people who had fostered the development and were now attempting to disseminate the virus were faced with the same problems as those with the vaccine. Their timetable had been screwed up and that, as much as anything else, probably saved a lot of lives. Several nations took note of who didn't attempt to secure the vaccine. Most of these people turned out to be rich and powerful, does that surprise you?

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Friday, April 4, 2008... Year 3, Day 166 PT... Day 896 PT...

"Any word on how the vaccinations are going?" Gary asked.

"People were still standing in line when the curfew went into effect at midnight," Jack replied. "We ended up doing escort duty getting the people home until almost 3am. Steve can tell you what the estimates are about the number of people that have been vaccinated. However, there have been a few reported outbreaks of this weaponized virus. Apparently the feds used the same set of priorities as the medical community in the In-

land Empire did and the healthcare providers and first responders were all immunized when you fellas discovered the vaccine.”

“You know, for as much as I don’t like these darned NIC’s,” Gary said, “I think they’re pretty handy. All you have to carry in your wallet or purse is a single card. I expect that the government will modify the system and maintain health records in a centralized location so a swipe of your NIC will bring up your complete medical history. Congress is going to need to implement some serious safeguards for the system however. And those computer whizzes of theirs are going to have to plug the holes so guys like Robert can’t hack and crack the system.”

“Gary, Ron and you are responsible, in your own way for saving our butts,” Steve said. “Whatever possessed the two of you to drive down to Hemet in the first place?”

“My loving wife is a busybody and I guess it just rubbed off,” Gary laughed. “I hate secrets anyway. I was hoping to rip off some medical equipment, not to find a vaccine. Ron went along simply because I asked him to.”

“I don’t understand why anyone would make a weapon out of Ebola,” Clarence said. “That had to be pretty risky trying to make the weapon and develop a vaccine.”

“Terry told me that he worked for the Trilateral Commission, indirectly,” Jack explained. “I suspect that they’re the people behind this whole thing. I can’t imagine what their motive could have been unless it was to gain power. But, that doesn’t really make any sense because they had most of the power to begin with. Anyway, they were responsible for eliminating the doctors who developed both the virus and the vaccine. Took care of all the witnesses, so to speak.”

“Dammit, I asked if there were any word on how the vaccinations were going,” Gary repeated. “Steve, can you answer my question or not?”

“Not really, no,” Steve replied. “You saw the reports on TV about all of those long lines. Jack was right about the outbreaks, however. The problem is that it takes the vaccine up to 2 weeks to develop the immunity. People who were somehow exposed to the virus before or just after getting the vaccinations are probably in worse shape than if they didn’t have the shot in the first place because that’s a major assault on their immune systems. Plus, you have to ask yourself how many people who showed up to get the vaccinations had been exposed already.”

“With Ebola, persons develop fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, and loss of appetite first,” Steve explained. “As the disease progresses, vomiting, bloody diarrhea, abdominal pain, sore throat, and chest pain can occur. The blood fails to clot and patients bleed from injection sites as well as into the gastrointestinal tract, skin, and internal organs. Basically, you just bleed from every orifice. Ebola Zaire seems to be fatal in about 90% of the cases. Ebola Sudan is fatal in about 60%. We can’t really determine a fatality rate in humans for the recently discovered Ebola Tai strain. There has only been one

case, and the Swiss researcher who contracted it from a chimpanzee in the Tai forest was critically ill, but she survived, probably due to the intensive care she received in Switzerland. Ebola Reston is not known to be fatal to humans, but is very fatal to monkeys.”

“Close personal contact with persons who are infected but who do not yet show signs of active disease is unlikely to result in infection. Recent studies however, indicate that even in the earlier stages of the Ebola infection, the virus can be present on the surface of the skin of the person who is infected with the virus either through secretions of sweat through the skin, or in the later stages of the disease – through the virus escaping through the skin cells. Even in small quantities, the Ebola virus can reproduce rapidly if exposed to an area that is easily infected such as the eyes,” Steve continued.

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“We shouldn’t have waited,” the man said. “This whole thing will come down on our heads. You know how they are going to blame us for this failure and how they deal with failure, don’t you?”

“Yes sir, I do,” the other man replied.

Pfutt, Pfutt.

“It also occurred to me that the early bird gets the worm.”

◦

“You’ve been awfully quiet, Ron,” Steve observed. “Your theory about a conspiracy was right. I would have thought you’d have been pleased with yourself.”

“What is there to be pleased about, Doc?” Ron asked. “Maybe 10% of the population is dying because of that conspiracy.”

“Because it is only 10% instead of 90%, Ron,” Steve replied. “Like I said, the two of you stumbling onto that vaccine saved our butts.”

“Anybody checked the sky lately?” Clarence asked.

◦

Monday, April 7, 2008... Year 3, Day 169 PT... Day 899 PT...

It was too early for there to be any figures of how extensive the illness was. Virtually every country had an idea that it could get pretty bad and they tended to follow Bush’s lead on this one. The more industrialized nations were better able to implement a system of martial law and early on, their experience with the intentionally spread illness

seemed to be following the pattern in the US, if that was any sort of guideline. Some countries with high population densities, like India for example, didn't have it quite so good; but they had the advance notice and did their best to limit their peoples' exposures. Maybe they were experiencing a 15% instead of a 10% exposure rate, but it was still early.

The law enforcement establishments of the countries began to turn out as soon as their medical communities could assure them that the vaccine had provided them with an effective immunity. They were masked up and wearing safety glasses and gloves, but they were able to function. Interpol acted as the central repository for the information being gained through the investigations. Those rich and powerful people who didn't need to be immunized were singled out for particular attention. In some countries, the laws are a little different than in the US and some of those protections that Americans hold so dear simply do not exist. Things like the 1st through the 10th Amendments to the US Constitution, for example.

The effectiveness of the vaccine soon came under scrutiny because not everyone took the appropriate precautions. It was soon learned, however, that some people had presumed that the vaccine prevented the disease rather than prevented it from killing you.

"7. When a person is exposed to the virus, the immune system immediately produces the correct antibodies, which cap the proteins on the target virus's surface, blocking its ability to infect cells."

That doesn't say you won't contract the disease; it says that the antibodies won't let it kill you. This was also why people whose immune systems were compromised because of age or infirmity needed things like flu vaccines every year. Sometimes the World Health Organization (WHO) picked the wrong three flu viruses to protect against and people died anyway. But, just as often when they missed, the vaccine provided some protection. Vaccinated people who contracted Ebola generally had to endure the first stage of symptoms while the immune system started to crank out those antibodies. Whatever, it beat the heck out of dying.

Monday, April 14, 2008... Year 3, Day 176 PT... Day 906 PT...

Two weeks in the vaccine had generated the antibodies and most of the US population had a pretty good idea if they were going to live or die. Every step that George Bush had taken had served to reduce the contagion. CDC in Atlanta was offering estimates of about an 8% death rate. There are 8 million stories in the Naked City and... oops, got carried away. The masterminds behind this great scheme to redesign humanity into an image of their choosing were about to get a rude awakening. Interpol is headquartered in Lyon, France. Interpol's Secretary General Ronald K. Noble has extensive international law enforcement expertise. A former member of Interpol's Executive Committee, Ronald K. Noble has also been President of the 26-nation Financial Action Task Force, the anti-money laundering organization established by the G7 in 1989. Mr. Noble holds

a Juris Doctorate degree from Stanford University Law School and a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Business Administration from the University of New Hampshire.

An Associate Professor of Law at the New York University School of Law, his law enforcement career includes service in both the US Department of Justice (1984-1989) and Treasury (1993-1996). In addition to service as an Assistant US Attorney and Deputy Assistant Attorney General, he was Chief Law Enforcement Officer in the US Treasury Department between 1994 and 1996. In this position he had command overseeing several of the largest law enforcement agencies in the United States: the Secret Service, the Customs Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the federal Law Enforcement Training Center, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, and the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service.

Mr. Noble wasn't about to let any of the participants in this unworldly scheme escape justice. In a negotiated settlement, many countries took advantage of America's often criticized death penalties and yielded jurisdiction to the United States. Maybe it was their way of paying the US back for providing the vaccine that saved their populations. All that was left to do was arrest the bums. Did you know that the Miranda warning isn't required in every country? Leastways, not if the officers conducting the interrogation aren't American peace officers.

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"Well partner that worked out all right. What do you think, should we quit while we're ahead?" Gary asked Ron.

"Quit what?" Ron asked.

"Stirring up hate and discontent? Hell I don't know, I guessing that I'm asking if we should really retire," Gary replied.

"You mean retire, retire, as in not work anymore?" Clarence asked.

"Yeah, like that," Gary said. "We could hook up our horse trailers and load up our scooters and see the country."

"Nah, I don't want to do that," Ron replied. "If I'm going to really retire, I'm not doing anything. Besides, this thing isn't over yet; Bush hasn't cancelled martial law. I suspect that he won't be doing that for the full 30 days. Leastways not until there are no new cases of Ebola. We're still under a 24-hour curfew."

"Darn, I forgot," Gary agreed. "Ok, I guess that means no horseback riding either. "How about some scooter races, I'm bored to tears?"

"They all go the same speed, Gary," Clarence laughed.

“SOMEBODY THINK OF SOMETHING,” Gary shouted.

“Good night, George,” Clarence said.

“Good night, Gracie,” Ron replied.

Big John – Chapter 34 – Going Home

Thursday, May 1, 2008... Year 3, Day 193 PT... Day 923 PT...

The night before, President Bush had finally announced the lifting of martial law. The residents of The Village had held a meeting after the President's address and all but the 4 deputies and Randy had announced that with the emergency over, they were returning to their homes. This even included The Three Amigos and their families. CDC's initial estimates of the extent of the virus were about 3% high and the US had lost only about 5% of its population. Apparently, even administered late the vaccine had some effect and countries that initially reported 15% potential mortality rate eventually came in with single digit figures.

Bush had called in every trump card he had and had managed to get Congress to repeal all firearms legislation and reword the 2nd Amendment. The amended 2nd Amendment had been quickly ratified by a phone in vote by $\frac{3}{4}$ of the states. Interpol had rounded up the masterminds behind the virus plot and they were languishing in an American jail. Social Security was being revisited with an eye to: 1) repaying all of the money Congress had borrowed from the system; and, 2) changing both the contribution formula and the method of investing the Social Security Trust Funds. With the loss of the unholy 7 in the Senate, Congress had suddenly gotten much more reasonable and Bush worked with them instead of fighting them.

The National Rifle Association had 2 offices, one in Virginia and one in California. With the organization having realized the dream of a lifetime, all of their representatives concentrated on the states with the most repressive gun laws. States like MD, CA, CT, HI, MA, NJ, IL, NY, NB, RI, IA, WI, DE, MO, NC, CO, OR, SC and VA headed their list in descending order from most repressive to less repressive. The NRA used the Brady List with the states getting the best grade on the list getting the most attention. It was a ballsy campaign and with so many liberals having died in the past 3 years they were making serious inroads into getting the repressive gun laws repealed. The goal was to get every state to the position of 'shall issue' with respect to CCW's with full reciprocity between all 50 states and the 14 territories. If a state wanted to follow Alaska's example that was even better. LaPierre also did a media blitz, somehow baiting all of those liberal media people into doing an interview.

Ron and Gary were celebrities, but only for the briefest period of time. When the White House suggested giving them an award, they negotiated instead for them getting those US Deputy Marshals badges turned into the real thing for The Three Amigos. They declined all requests to appear on any TV or radio shows, citing their inherent right to privacy. Besides, they claimed, they were only following up on a lead someone else had given them. Sheriff Gary Penrod had said, "You give a man a badge and a gun and he thinks he's Wyatt Earp."

One sometimes hears about "syndromes." In the study of police culture, these usually refer to the problem of trying to live up to an IMAGE or IDEOLOGY. They are not syn-

dromes in the clinical sense, and are perhaps better understood as examples of role strain, when the job demands more of an individual than what they have to give. For example, it was Ramsey Clark who once said that police have to be “lawyer, scientist, medic, psychologist, athlete, and public servant.” Examples of a few syndromes are:

- the Wyatt Earp syndrome - badge heavy, macho, victim of image
- the John Wayne syndrome - over serious, coldness, tunnel vision
- the Doc Holliday syndrome - suspicious, bitter, quick-tempered
- the Custer syndrome - defending police work, anti-rest of system
- the Parker syndrome - defending thin blue line, anti-society attitude
- the amotivational syndrome - HEW term for police burnout
- the Ganzer syndrome - type of battle fatigue involving humor to ward off horror

They left off the Tired Old Man Syndrome, a combination of the Irritable Male Syndrome and the fact that many of the body parts didn't work anymore. It included numb hands and feet, a loss of hearing, poor eyesight, a failing memory and in 2 out of 3 cases, a bum ticker. Dubya got their badges replaced with the real thing, but there wasn't any difference between what they had and what they were given. And when the US Marshall's Service went to add their data to the computer database, it found that the information was already there and these old men were entitled to a whole lot of back pay. Thank you, Robert! They also left the Daryl F. Gates syndrome off the list, but it could be best described as 'all of the above'.

Hey, they weren't going all the way home; they were only moving back to their houses in Palmdale or wherever. The Good Lord would just have to wait a while longer, their adventure had barely begun. Then again, when you'd saved the world, LOL, everything after that must come as a letdown. But, Ron and Gary didn't quite see things that way. You simply can't take credit for what was obviously dumb luck.

Friday, May 2, 2008... Year 3, Day 194 PT... Day 924 PT...

After getting the water, lights, gas and phone turned back on Gary got Derek to start un-installing the concertina. Damon helped and by the end of the day, the house at 4560 Moonraker Road almost looked like a home again instead of a fortress. The Three Amigos were pretty well prepared, considering, because they'd survived the BIG ONE and WW III in their homes. Actually WW III was in Gary's little shelter, but Ron and Clarence had built their own shelters after they'd gotten out of Gary's. So, unless something happened to end the world, they were darn well prepared. The residents of the Moon Shadows housing tract had taken care of the livestock and the geezers just added their horses. Had to let you know how they made out, but this story didn't start off being about The Three Amigos and it might not end that way. The thing is, they were mighty busy down at Liberty Village and we may just stick with The Three Amigos until the Deputies finish up a little chore that they wanted to do.

Liberty Village...

“Jack, what are we going to do with the minefield?” Steve asked.

“Steve we can spray the grass with an herbicide and kill it off, I suppose,” Jack replied. “Then, when the grass is dead, we can probably burn it off to expose the mines. The M14’s might be the easy part, but those M-16’s may have an anti-tampering device. I’m darned if I know.”

“I’m going to check with someone on the bomb squad and see if they know,” Steve suggested.

Saturday, May 3, 2008... Year 3, Day 195 PT... Day 925 PT...

“Jack do you know Bobby Evans?” Steve asked.

“Don’t believe we met Bobby, are you here to help us with the minefield?” Jack replied.

“If I can yes, Jack,” Bobby replied. “Otherwise we’re going to have to detonate them in place. I need to know exactly the steps you guys used to install the mines.”

“Well, we dug a hole, set the mine in it, packed it in place with some soil and removed the locking safety pin,” Jack explained.

“You didn’t set up the trip wire?” Bobby asked.

“Nope, we were in too big of a hurry,” Jack replied.

“Then you didn’t install an anti-handling device separately?” Bobby asked.

“I thought it was built in,” Jack said.

“Not at all,” Bobby replied. “This card shows the steps in disarming and removing an M-16 Bouncing Betty.”

M-16 Mine Deactivation:

1. Disarm the mine.

- Clear the soil carefully from the top of the fuse to the positive safety-pin hole. When using the M605 fuse, clear away all the soil from the fuse area.
- Insert the positive safety pin through the positive safety-pin hole.
- Insert the locking safety pin through the locking safety-pin hole.
- Cut the slack trip wires that are attached to the release-pin ring.

2. Check for AHDs.

- Hold the mine body firmly in place with one hand.
- Feel for AHDs with the other hand by digging around the sides of and underneath the mine.

3. Remove the mine.

- Remove the mine from the hole. Ensure that the safety pins remain in place.
- Remove the M605 fuse with the M25 wrench.
- Replace the shipping plug in the fuse well.

“What about the M14’s?” Jack asked.

“That’s this card,” Bobby replied.

M14 Mine Deactivation:

1. Disarm the mine.

- Clear the soil away from the mine carefully.
- Grasp the body of the mine firmly with one hand, and insert the safety clip with the other hand.
- Use the M22 wrench to turn the pressure plate to the SAFE position.

2. Remove the mine from the hole.

- Turn the mine over, and carefully remove the detonator from the detonator well.
- Screw the shipping plug into the detonator well.
- Give the detonator to the NCOIC.

“Here’s a copy of Field Manual 20-32 that tells you how to install and remove all of the US landmines,” Bobby said, handing a book to Steve. “It even has pictures for all of you rocket scientists. How many mines did you fellas plant?”

“A semi-trailer load,” Jack answered ruefully.

“Have fun fellas,” Bobby said. “Sorry I can’t help you.”

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George: Condi! Nice to see you. What’s happening?

Condi: Sir, I have the report here about the new leader of China.

George: Great. Lay it on me.

Condi: Hu is the new leader of China.

George: That’s what I want to know.

Condi: That’s what I’m telling you.

George: That’s what I’m asking you. Who is the new leader of China?

Condi: Yes.

George: I mean the fellow's name.

Condi: Hu.

George: The guy in China.

Condi: Hu.

George: The new leader of China.

Condi: Hu.

George: The main man in China!

Condi: Hu is leading China.

George: Now whaddya' asking me for?

Condi: I'm telling you, Hu is leading China.

George: Well, I'm asking you. Who is leading China?

Condi: That's the man's name.

George: That's who's name?

Condi: Yes.

George: Will you, or will you not, tell me the name of the new leader of China?

Condi: Yes, sir.

George: Yassir? Yassir Arafat is in China? I thought he's dead in the Middle East.

Condi: That's correct.

George: Then who is in China?

Condi: Yes, sir.

George: Yassir is in China?

Condi: No, sir.

George: Then who is?

Condi: Yes, sir.

George: Yassir?

Condi: No, sir.

George: Look Condi. I need to know the name of the new leader of China. Get me the Secretary General of the UN on the phone.

Condi: Kofi?

George: No, thanks.

Condi: You want Kofi?

George: No.

Condi: You don't want Kofi.

George: No. But now that you mention it, I could use a glass of milk. And then get me the UN.

Condi: Yes, sir.

George: Not Yassir! The guy at the UN.

Condi: Kofi?

George: Milk! Will you please make the call?

Condi: And call who?

George: Who is the guy at the UN?

Condi: Hu is the guy in China.

George: Will you stay out of China!

Condi: Yes, sir.

George: And stay out of the Middle East! Just get me the guy at the UN.

Condi: Kofi.

George: All right! With cream and two sugars. Now get on the phone.

And you thought all the time I was talking about Abbott and Costello! (Couldn't resist, got an e-mail.)

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How long does it take 4 men to remove a truckload of mines? It takes more than one day. If they're not careful it may take a lifetime. Figure one case of 4 M-16 mines per Deputy per hour. Figure maybe twice as many of the M14's, which were packed 90 to the case. Let's see: $8 \times 8 = 64 \times 4 = 256 \times 2 = 512$ (a weekend). Two weekends were needed to eliminate the M14's. $4 \times 8 = 32 \times 4 = 128 \times 2 = 256$ (a weekend). The rest of the summer was needed to remove the M-16's. You must remember, the minefield was 50-yards sown with M14's and 800-yards sown with M-16's. About 50-yards out, there was a minefield that went to the 900-yard mark. 800 of those 850-yards are filled with Bouncing Betty's and they are totally randomly sown and unmapped. The last 50 yards are sown with concussive mines that might or might not kill you. Yep, it definitely would take all summer. Or an eternity, whichever came first.

Why remove the mines? Well, can't you just see yourself trying to explain to your insurance agent that it's not your fault a 5-year old child can't read one of 32 languages and didn't realize that the barbed wire fence was there to keep him out? And, once they removed the minefield, they had 1,000-yards cleared to the north of the housing area upon which they could build many more rows of cabins. You might wonder why Randy wasn't helping. Randy wasn't dumb and he quickly pointed out that those homes sitting on the pillars would be much more secure if they were lifted off the pillars and set on a concrete slab. He volunteered to remove and reset the 15 cabins sitting on pillars. He told them he should be done with the cabins about the time they were done with the mines. I think that you could pretty much count on Randy finishing up about one day after the last mine was removed.

Randy poured several smaller slabs for each home, leaving just enough room for the lifting timbers to drop into when the homes were lowered into place. Then, he planned to go back and pour the remaining concrete and attach all of those clamps to the slabs to keep the houses from sliding off the slabs. He had to go slow; he didn't want to end up on that mine clearing detail.

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Friday, July 4, 2008... Year 3, Day 257 PT... Day 987 PT...

The Three Amigos had called ahead a couple of days and were planning on spending the day at Liberty Village. It just seemed appropriate what with it being Independence Day and everything. They brought a huge pan of fried chicken, potato salad, pasta sal-

ad and watermelon from their gardens. Sandy and the gals at Liberty Village had hamburger, hot dogs, home baked buns and a variety of desserts.

“Good to see you guys,” Gary said, “Been keeping busy?”

“Well, we removed 12 cases of the M14 mines over the course of the May 3-4th and May 10-11th weekends,” Jack explained. “That’s 12 full cases with 90 mines to the case. Then, on May 17th we started in on those M-16’s. So far, we removed 448 cases of 4 mines to the case or 1,732 M-16 mines. It looks like we planted maybe 1,024 cases of the M-16’s. We hope to be finished up on August 31st. It appears we had an even 1,000 cases of the M-16’s or 4,000 mines.”

“Where are you going to store the mines, Jack,” Gary asked.

“I think we put some in the shelter armory and some in the storage building. Why?” Jack asked.

“Well, if you’re short of room, we’d we willing to take a few of the M-18A1 Claymores off your hands,” Gary offered.

“How many do you need?” Jack asked.

“How many to the case?” Gary returned.

“6 M7 bandoleers, each holding the mine and all its accessories, plus 1 M40 test set per case,” Jack replied. “Ideal frontal coverage requires a mine every 25 yards.”

“The housing tract perimeter is 600 yards, Jack, so ideally we would need 24 mines,” Gary said. “Can you spare 4 cases?”

“We can give you 5 cases, Gary, that will allow you to put one on each corner of the tract, and have a couple of spares,” Jack replied.

(Gary wasn’t thinking clearly, because he was thinking 2 200-yard legs, the north and the south and 2 100-yard legs, the east and the west. That’s 600-yards. But the housing tract was square and the entire south perimeter was up against another tract. Call him Mr. Lucky; he had 3 200-yard legs, which was still 600-yards.)

Much of the conversation centered on what the NRA was trying to force through the various state legislatures. In California, for example, tremendous pressure was brought to bear and it was succeeding; 2008 was an election year. Much of the liberal powerbase the Democrats in Sacramento enjoyed came from large cities. They’d pretty much lost that power base 987 days before. They had resolved to put the new law, tailored after Alaska’s, on the ballot and let the voters decide. There just had to be something wrong with a legislature that couldn’t make up its mind and had to put even minor issues on a ballot for the voters to decide. But there wasn’t anything minor about this proposal. It

was generally agreed that come November 4th the people of California would finally find out whether it was the liberals or conservatives who survived all of the things that had plagued the state since early in 2005.

One thing they all agreed on was their assessment of President Bush. The fact that he was about to leave office notwithstanding, the man did tend to speak his mind. He wasn't hiding his light under a bushel; it was out there for everyone to see. He may have been ill advised on some issues but he stuck to his guns. And, although he didn't come right out and support the NRA as many critics said he would, the 1994 legislation had been allowed to sunset and now he was trying to restore what this group of people thought was what the framers of the Bill of Rights had intended.

"I wouldn't mind calling ourselves Libertarians," Gary said, "Except there is already a political party by that name and I don't fully agree with them."

"You happy up there in Palmdale?" Steve asked.

"Not entirely, no," Ron admitted. "There are areas up there with lots of radioactive hot spots and it just isn't the same."

"If we could sell our homes, we'd be ok," Clarence observed, "But right now there are so many empty houses that I doubt we could sell them, even though they're fully equipped for any kind of disaster."

"I've sort of lost count of all the disasters we've had," Gary explained.

"By my count, it's been 6," Marty remarked, "Counting the virus attack as number 6."

"Well good," Gary laughed, "Six down and three more to go."

"Ron, if you fellas aren't happy up in Palmdale, why don't you move back here?" Steve suggested.

"We can talk about it some more on Labor Day," Ron replied. "You did say that you'd have all of those mines out by the end of August, right?"

"Chickens," Jack laughed.

"Puck, puck, puck," The Three Amigos replied in unison.

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Monday, September 1, 2008... Year 3, Day 316 PT... Day 1,046 PT...

Early on the previous day, the 4 men succeeded in removing the last 8 cases of mines. They had resorted to storing all of the M14's and M-16's in a semi-trailer because there

wasn't really room in the storage building. All that remained was for them to remove the M-18 Claymores and store them as well. After that, the remaining logs had to be moved, cut and split. Randy had all of the houses finished. In the process, he had eliminated the 2x10 supports and was in the process of attaching the 2x6s directly to the slabs. He figured to be done with that and putting in the new floors about the time the M-18's were disarmed and back in their bandoleers.

"Tell me Randy," Gary asked, "How thick of a wall can you pour with that slip form machine of yours?"

"About 16"-18", " Randy replied, "Why do you ask?"

"If you were to put in a wall all the way around the village," Gary explained, "You wouldn't really need to have the great big minefield. How fast does that wall go in?"

"I poured the shelter walls at 6" per minute, but I think I'd have to back off some if we poured a 16" or 18" wall," Randy replied. "Say 24' an hour. But that's a lot of wall, Gary. You're talking about 3,000' feet on a side and no less than 3,000' across the north side. That would take a continuous pour of $9,000 \div 24$ or about 375 hours; that's about 16 days figuring the time to change directions on the machine. 9,000' of 16" wall say 8' high is about 96,000 cubic feet of concrete. Those trucks hold 324 cubic feet of concrete per load so you're looking at 296 loads of concrete."

"Why don't you get one of your contractor buddies to loan you a portable batch plant and all you'd have to do would be to truck in the materials," Gary suggested. "That would cut way down on the amount of fuel you'd need to transport the concrete and you could wet mix it and get by with maybe 3-4 trucks."

"Assuming we wanted to wall in Liberty Village in the first place," Randy replied.

"We still have 3 disasters to go, Randy," Gary cautioned.

"What are the two of you yapping about?" Jack asked joining Gary and Randy.

"Gary was talking about putting a wall around Liberty Village and I was explaining how much material and how much time it would take," Randy explained.

"How long would it take?" Jack asked.

"About 16 days," Randy replied.

"With a wall, we could avoid putting that minefield back in," Jack observed. "I'm going to talk it over with Steve, Marty and Sergeant, but if they agree, we'll go for the wall and drop that trailer load of M14 and M-16 mines off at Barstow. We'll keep the Claymores, of course. So, Gary, are you fellas moving back to Liberty Village or staying in Palmdale?"

“We sold our houses for about what we had into them or maybe a little less,” Gary replied. “We had to leave all of the improvements, but that allowed us to sell. So, we’re going to be moving back sometime before the end of September.”

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“How many people will that shelter support?” Jack asked.

“It’s 60’x400’ and at 200 square feet per person, about 120,” Randy replied. “The thing is, if we cut that to 50 square feet per person, it would support 480 people.”

“I wasn’t thinking that many,” Jack said. “But I guess now that I think about it maybe I was. We could add 3 more rows of cabins to the compound easily enough.”

“Jack we’re going to have to leave more room for our livestock,” Sergeant pointed out. “Why don’t we just put in a second row of 32 cabins and take it from there? Even with the people from Palmdale moving back in, we’re going to have 15 empty cabins.”

“14,” Jack said, “Chris and Patti are coming back too.”

“I suppose I’d better pour those 32 slabs after I get the wall done,” Randy suggested. “Plus get the utilities in. The real question in my mind is where we are going to get all of the building materials. We don’t have the money to buy them.”

“Sergeant, do you have that list of abandoned communities?” Jack asked.

“I do in my cabin, Jack,” Sergeant said, “What did you have in mind?”

“Why bother asking Sergeant,” Marty laughed, “Jack is planning on requisitioning everything we need from the abandoned communities, right Jack?”

“Seems like a shame to let it go to waste, Marty,” Jack replied. “We’re going to need plumbing supplies, wiring and fixtures, building materials, solar panels, batteries and inverters, appliances, furniture and two more buildings, one for a second community building and one for a second storage building.”

“Maybe we should move those water tanks up to the top of the new section,” Randy suggested. “Then we could use gravity to generate our water pressure.”

“I’ll go along with that,” Steve said, “But I’d like to see us put in another 10 of those stand tanks if we could.”

“First, we need to remove those Claymore mines, pull down the fence, roll the wire and stack the logs,” Jack suggested. “After that, we’ll start collecting building materials and the things we need to double the size of this compound.”

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Tuesday, September 30, 2008... Year 3, Day 345 PT... Day 1,075 PT...

Cabin 01: Barranca, Steve and Sandy, Jimmy and Ruth.
Cabin 02: Wilson, Marty, Selma, Sissy and Marty.
Cabin 03: Rowland, Howard 'Sergeant', Beth, Sandra and Billy.
Cabin 04: Douglas, Jack, Moira, Jennifer and Joey.
Cabin 05: Jenkins, Randy, Belinda, Randy and Sarah.
Cabin 06: Olsen, Gary and Sharon.
Cabin 07: Olsen, Damon, Britney, Aaron and Erik.
Cabin 08: Olsen, Derek, Mary, DJ, Elizabeth, Joshua and Thomas.
Cabin 09: Colvin, David, Lorrie, Josh, Justin, Jason, Jesse, Jeffery.
Cabin 10: Moon, Amy, Audrey and Udell Jr.
Cabin 11: Green, Ron and Linda.
Cabin 12: Adams, Mark and Paula.
Cabin 13: Matthews, Bobby Joe, Jennifer, Bobby, Sheila and Jennifer.
Cabin 14: Green, John, Kevin and Brenda.
Cabin 15: Rawlings, Clarence and Lucy.
Cabin 16: Rawlings, Clarence Jr., Denise, Fred and Lucy.
Cabin 17: Rawlings, James, Tamara and Clarence.
Cabin 18: Peedan, Christopher, Patricia, Matthew and Daniel.
Cabin 19: - Cabin 32: Empty.
Cabin 33: - Cabin 64: Under Construction.

Wall erected, 32 additional slabs installed along with utilities. M14 and M-16 mines returned to Barstow. Water tanks ready to move; the new pipes had been installed. October was deemed to be Scavenging Month with The Three Amigos in charge and Randy generating the lists of materials they needed to complete the project. Randy had gotten by with 3 of the 12-yard concrete trucks, but he kept them and the bulk plant until he had time to pour the slabs for the new community building and storage building. He'd terraced the 1,000-yard strip between the row of cabins and the north wall, thanks to some help from Jose and Manny. They were thinking about moving back too. As far as that went, so were Bob Pelham and John Hewlett and their families.

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Saturday, November 1, 2008... Year 4, Day 11 PT... Day 1,107 PT...

Everything they need for the massive building project was collected and stored. Randy had put in the slabs for the 2nd community building and 2nd storage building and had erected the storage building first. It was piled to the ceiling with building materials, etc. for the 32 new cabins. They now had 20 stand tanks at the top of the hill and there were 240,000-gallons of water in storage. They also had some returning residents:

Cabin 19: Cervantes, Manny, Maria, Manuel and Maria.
Cabin 20: Cervantes, Jose, Maureen, David and Maureen.
Cabin 21: Hewlett, John, Lynn, Susan and Rachael.
Cabin 22: Pelham, Robert, Loretta, Christopher and Shaun.

Those among the 5 original residents who owned homes had sold them off. Now, there was nowhere to go back to. Randy built the 2nd community building before they started on the cabins. That resolved any issues that seemed to arise over what to watch on the TV or what music to have in the jukebox. There seemed to be some generational issues so the young people took over the second community building and the older people the first. It also made it easier because there wasn't any liquor in the second community building. Randy was rather reluctant to start building the new cabins. So, he got Jose and Manny started on building the trusses that they needed to complete all 32 and said that once the trusses were completed, they'd start on the cabins and get them closed in one at a time.

Big John – Chapter 35 – A Winter Without Disaster

On this first day of November 2008 the election was coming on the following Tuesday. It appeared that the government had nearly full compliance on the NIC's because the NIC was also your voter registration card. If you lost your NIC, it was no big deal either; you reported the loss, paid \$10 to cover the cost of a replacement card and after your biometric data was verified, you were issued a new card with a new number and the old card cancelled. Anyone attempting to use your old card would find it to be totally useless and make him or her subject to arrest. The machine ate the card, ensuring that it would never be used again. No, it didn't keep the card – it destroyed it. All of which made prosecuting someone for attempting to use the card very difficult, if not impossible. They were going to have to rethink that one.

Voter registration was now completely automatic because you had to keep your address current on you NIC. Maybe there was a little bit of big brother somewhere in that mix, but all transactions were now tied to your NIC. And if you forgot to do it, no problem, any transaction that involved an address change automatically updated the system. Remember what Ron had said?

“One of these days, you're going to have to get permission from the government to take a pee,” Ron grouched.

That wasn't going to happen. When Congress had voted in all of those new controls on the National Identity Cards, they made darned sure it couldn't. The database was now all but a closed system and all of the best hackers and crackers in the world were invited to give it a try. Notice that I didn't say it couldn't be done. Never say never! If it could be hacked or cracked, they hadn't figured out how to do it, yet. Every American citizen now received an External Passport in the mail about 3 weeks after they were issued their NIC's. And everyone had a NIC from cradle to grave, or that was the plan at least.

With the government seemingly becoming a government of the people, by the people and for the people, many concerns about National Identity Cards were being laid to rest. To top it off, the penalties for using a false identification were now rather severe, having become a felony with a 10-year mandatory prison sentence. They sure needed to fix that problem with the readers eating the NIC's. Not to worry, Robert had fixed up everybody with all of those phonies BEFORE the new system went into effect so the folks at Liberty Village with phony ID's were covered.

Not one person in the entire country, including the programmers who had fashioned the new system had all of the pieces to the code. The old records had been transferred to the new system intact, e.g., they were 'grandfathered' in. Kind of gave a whole new meaning to the term grandfather when you realized that certain people had at least 4 sets of valid ID. A system of cross checks would have easily caught the duplication of the biometric data, but they were deemed unnecessary. It was hard enough to get people to get 1 NIC, who would be crazy enough to have 2 or more? Computers with al-

most zero human intervention now handled everything having to do with financial transactions, identification and voter and CCW registration. One size fits all. Sorta.

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Wednesday, November 5, 2008... Year 4, Day 15 PT... Day 1,111 PT...

After November 2, 2004, the talking heads and pundits have had a field day speculating on the reasons for Red (Republican) and Blue (Democratic) states. Of course even in the Red states over 40% voted Democratic and in Blue states over 40% voted Republican. Nonetheless we have been treated with interesting and imaginative ideas. Now we have more objective measures of the Red and Blue differences. The United Health Foundation has issued state-by-state analyses on many health related measures (1) I selected eight of these risk factors and compared them for 8 Red and 8 Blue states (2) selected at random. The results follow.

Motor vehicle deaths are given in deaths per 100 million miles driven. Death rates from motor vehicle accidents are 75% higher in Red than in Blue States (1.9 vs. 1.1 deaths per 100 million miles traveled). Occupational fatalities were 7.9 per 100,000 workers in Red states and one-half that (3.8) in Blue states. Workers are more than twice as likely to die on the job in Red states as in Blue states. Red states had an average of 23.9% tobacco smokers whereas Blue states had 20.5%. Infant mortality rates are 57% higher in Red state than in Blue states (8.3 deaths per 1,000 live births in Red states vs. 5.3 in Blue states). You are safer and healthier in a Blue state than in a Red state.

In education, the high school graduation rate (percent of incoming ninth graders graduating) averaged 61.3% in our Red states and 73.4% in our Blue states. Blue states had a 12.1% advantage. Child poverty was more prevalent in Red states, with an average of 19.6% compared to an average of 14.1% in Blue States.

Violent crimes (offenses per 100,000 population) has scattered data but the average for Red states is 499 vs. 357 in Blue states.

Overall our Red states ranked an average of 40 (1 best, 50 worst) and our Blue states ranked 13. The reader needs to do his own evaluation of these results. There do seem to be real statistical differences in Red vs. Blue states. We are dealing here with averages and they can and do cover up individual differences. We have analyzed subsets of 8 states each of the Red and Blue states but it is doubtful if the results would be much different if we used all 50 states. Assuming these differences are real, then we need to dig deeper to examine what these differences mean. The nation was polarized during the election and is likely to remain so. We must ask what can we do to bring the nation together. Would you rather live in a Red or Blue state?

If that's the case, how come all of the states were Red on Wednesday morning? I know, I know! George W. Bush bought the voters by giving them back the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. Everybody who voted for the reforms, regardless of party, was

reelected. Everybody who voted against was now the former Representative/Senator from the great state of (insert name). I sure hope that I don't wake up in the middle of this; it is quite the dream. Well, almost everybody, let's be fair. There were still some voting precincts that didn't give a flip how their representative voted as long as the money kept coming in from that old pork barrel.

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Gary wasn't thinking about the election results. He'd finally gotten around to reading a book that Sharon had bought him back before all the trouble began. Much to his shock and chagrin, it turned out that his writing style were nothing more than his feeble attempts to emulate the style of a prominent author who he'd long admired. The famous author had nothing to worry about; Gary was 10th on a 9-man team. That author, on his website said, "I am currently working on a novel, untitled, about an Islamic plot to detonate an atomic device in a major American city." Interestingly, Gary was 5 months older, to the day, than Nelson.

Many of DeMille's books are written in the first person, and as such his books follow a linear plotline in which the reader moves along with the main character.

Although the tone of his writing varies from novel to novel, one consistent tool is DeMille's liberal use of *sarcasm* and *dry humor*.

Most DeMille novels, especially the more recent, avoid "Hollywood endings," and instead finish either inconclusively or with the hero successfully exposing the secret/solving the mystery while suffering in his career or personal life as a result. There are generally loose ends left for the reader to puzzle over, *Night Fall* being a perfect example.

DeMille sometimes names the characters in his books after those wishing to be named in return for their generous contributions to various charities.

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Sunday, November 9, 2008... Year 4, Day 19 PT... Day 1,115 PT...

For a change, no one was questioning the results of the elections. That little plastic card in the wallets and purses made voter fraud impossible and all of the voting was now done electronically. Not bad for a nation still digging itself out from a series of tragedies and disasters. As America was being rebuilt, many things were changing. Since they had to rebuild many things from scratch, it became far simpler to use technology to solve problems that existed with the old ways of doing things.

Consider an example: From an accounting stand point, when you deposit money in your bank account, the bank debits cash and credits demand deposits, specifically your individual account, regardless of the type. From the bank's perspective, your balance is a

'Credit'. During the last half of the 20th Century, science fiction authors didn't talk about dollars, francs or pounds; they talked about money as 'Credits'. In the aftermath of WW III, the major banking houses had merged into a single financial institution, backed by the government. Most banking was becoming electronic anyway because of the NIC's and the bank showed your balance online as a 'Credit'. You could change the heading of the column using a pull down menu and the balance of your account could be shown in any currency based on the official exchange rate. It was starting to become a custom to refer to account balances as 'Credits' in whatever currency suited your fancy.

In the United States, the dollar was still the official medium or measure of exchange but more and more, people were disusing cash and only taking money out of their bank accounts in the form of debits. A debit being the offsetting entry to your bank account balance from the bank's perspective where they credited cash and debited your normally credit balance deposit account. See, it's not all that hard to understand, especially if you happen to be an accountant. But if science fiction writers could understand it, it was likely that anyone could with a little time. Another way to remember it is debits by the window (left), credits by the door (right). (Auditor joke.)

With the two most powerful nations in the world having avoided a confrontation, it seemed that things were beginning to change. Russia wasn't really the powerhouse everyone had thought they were and the US had backed down when the Russians did. Which, of course, really po'd off all of those Muslim nations. Where were we on the disaster/tragedy count? I think maybe six down and three to go. By the way, it appeared that more conservatives than liberals survived in California, they got their new gun law by a 75-25 majority.

Nearly every state in the union now had new gun laws and this was clearly evident when you watched the news. These reporters, commentators, announcers or whatever they called themselves were very suddenly much more circumspect. Anyway the crime rate had dropped through the floor after WW III, probably because so many people armed themselves, just in case (of trouble). This much was clearly evident at Liberty Village where they'd had very little trouble. Then again, they had that CAV sitting at the top of the fire road, didn't they? This Sunday afternoon, most of the adult males were gathered in the old community building discussing the 32 new cabins they were planning on building.

"The way that I think we ought to do it is just start down the row and frame and close the cabins in," Randy suggested. "We still have 10 empty cabins and every one we fill will give us a reason to go back and finish of the interior of a replacement. If, by the time we get all 32 framed and closed in, we don't have any new residents, we'll go back and begin at the beginning and finish them off."

"How long do you figure it will take to frame and close up a cabin Randy?" Jack asked.

"With the crew we have, we can finish one a week including door, windows and roof," Randy replied.

“Does that include the solar panels?” Steve asked.

“They’ll be mounted but not hooked up,” Randy replied. “We’ll hook them up after the wiring is installed when we finish the inside.”

“Do we have everything we need?” Jack wanted to know.

“We could use some more of the 100 pound propane bottles when you can find them,” Randy replied. “Figure 64 for the cabins, 36 spare and 5 each for the new community building and storage building. Try and find me 110, Jack.”

“Anything else?” Sergeant asked.

“Do you fellas still intend to equip each cabin with a M1A, M16 and a shotgun?” Randy asked.

“Yes, why, is there a problem?” Sergeant asked.

“Do we have enough weapons?” Randy asked.

“We have enough M16’s, Jack replied, “But we’re short on M1A/M14 rifles and shotguns. I’ll put them on the want list with the propane bottles along with some pistols and web gear.”

“We should swing by the armory and pick up the rest of the pickups we traded in for the Hummers,” Marty suggested. “The last time I drove by the armory, they were still sitting there.”

“Let’s get everyone with a driver’s license and do that this afternoon,” Jack suggested. “We can look for some propane bottles on the way home.”

By evening, they had recovered the pickups and had brought back 4 trailer loads of 100# propane bottles, which they’d filled at the distributors before returning home. That evening, the men sat around discussing other little chores they needed to do. It was decided that the people with jobs, like the 4 Deputies would work their jobs Monday through Friday and help split wood on Saturdays. Randy and his construction crew would frame and close in one cabin a week and help with the wood splitting on Saturdays. They asked The Three Amigos to spend Monday through Friday splitting wood and Saturdays hauling it to the cabins.

Once all the wood was finished, everyone would spend Saturdays finishing off cabins. Their target date to have all 32 cabins framed and closed in was Friday, June 19, 2009. With any kind of luck, they might have a dozen of the cabins finished off inside as well. And, if they added more residents to the village, they’d have more labor and be just that much closer to having the cabins finished. In order to turn this whole thing into a paying

venture, they agreed to rent cabins to future residents. These people could work off their rent by working for the community on its building project. With 64 families in the community, they hoped to be able to defend the place if, God forbid, something else happened or went wrong. Clarence, it should be noted, was still keeping an eye on the sky, but had seen nothing of significance.

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Sunday, November 16, 2008... Year 4, Day 26 PT... Day 1,122 PT...

Cabin 33 was closed in and The Three Amigos had spent the entire week just cutting logs. This gave the others the opportunity to divide their tasks between splitting wood and sawing additional logs. Ron, Clarence and Gary had spent Saturday hauling the wood and stacking it. It wasn't that bad because the others loaded the split wood into their pickups and all they had to do was haul it and toss it off. Still, The Three Amigos weren't kids anymore and by Sunday, they needed that day of rest. People, they decided, could stack their own wood. Which was fine and dandy until they got to the empty cabins at which time they'd have to deliver and stack the wood on the porches, back first and front second.

The second row of cabins also faced south toward the guard towers and ravine. They were on the first terrace up or about 20' higher than the first row of cabins so they would have a partial view of the valley. The service road for the second terrace was at the back of the terrace, not at the front. The water stand tanks were on the highest terrace on the east end; giving the water a 60' drop to produce water pressure. Which was at least 90' short of what they needed to develop 65psi. In establishing a proper elevation for reservoirs, one can calculate that every foot of head will produce .434 psi of pressure. Therefore to generate 65 psi in the water distribution system, storage reservoirs must be located at an elevation of approximately 150 ft. above the service area. Adequate system pressures are generally accepted to be between 65 and 85 psi. They were still forced to use the pumps to get acceptable water pressure, but in a pinch, they could now be bypassed, remotely.

Down in that shelter, the command center was becoming more and more complicated. They still had their closed circuit TV monitors and the wiring panels for the Claymore mines. When they did the continuous pour to put in that 9,000' wall, Randy had dropped a 2' section of 1" conduit every 25-yards and the Claymores were reinstalled right after the machine cleared the area. It meant rerouting all of the wires and testing all the circuits, but the wall provided a double layer of protection. Additional TV cameras were located and mounted on the wall and all of the monitors, except for the set at Steve and Sandy's were in the command center. Derek was back in charge of security and John Green was his principal assistant. And, although security wasn't a principal concern these days, the command center was staffed 24/7 with Brenda and Damon lending a helping hand. Kevin was still as useless as you know what on a boar hog.

The school aged children were picked up and delivered to school from where the fire road joined up with Lytle Creek Road, in case anyone was wondering about the educational needs of the children. Their educations had already been severely interrupted by the events that began in early 2005. Home schooling had helped, but there was only so much the families could do since they couldn't locate the teachers' lesson plans.

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On a personal note:

On Saturday, February 12, 2005, Sgt. Derek Spencer Ott (E-5, Iowa National Guard) volunteered to go to Iraq on a 'Security Detail'. It won't be known for 1 month whether or not he will be accepted for the 155-man detail providing convoy and green zone security in and around Baghdad. It's an 18-month tour of duty. If he goes and returns, it will not be as a tanker in either case. The Iowa National Guard is no longer going to be an armored unit. At least they gave him Interceptor Armor with (he said) level V ceramic plates (they weigh 20#) and he's going to wear his tanker spalling armor underneath the Interceptor gear. Care to guess who is going with him? Does the term ass chewing vs. a Silver Star ring a bell? His name is Bill. I'm proud, but very much on the short side of being happy about this development. I guess he can join the VFW if he makes it back in one piece. I understand of course, I volunteered to go to Nam in 1964 but I had one of those 'critical' Air Force Specialty codes (31350) and a million dollar education and they wouldn't let me go. It was probably just as well; I'd have gotten my butt shot off. If he goes, pop off a prayer for him and the other 130,000 troops fighting Mr. Bush's war for whatever reason we're fighting it. Bush may just get that letter yet! If it weren't so extreme, I suggest pulling our troops out and nuking the whole danged place.

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Sunday, November 23, 2008... Year 4, Day 33 PT... Day 1,129 PT...

Cabin 34 was closed in and during the past week Ron sawed logs, Gary split them and Clarence loaded, delivered and stacked the loads. They were now up to the empty cabins, but they sure had one hell of a big pile of loads. On the previous day they were back to delivering the firewood and the other fellas would be cutting and splitting more than the 3 old geezers could haul and stack. This was the week of Thanksgiving; so instead of starting cabin 35, the construction crew worked with The Three Amigos and they managed to saw, split and deliver about ½ of the remaining firewood. They had finished off the first 32 cabins and now were stacking firewood for the new cabins in the varying stages of construction. With no porches to stack the wood on, it went in what would have been the driveway about halfway back on the side of the slab.

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Sunday, November 30, 2008... Year 4, Day 40 PT... Day 1,136 PT...

They were now one cabin behind their schedule but they were one whole hell of a lot closer on their firewood production. The coming week, the construction crew would start cabin 35 and try to speed up a little over the next few weeks to get back on schedule. Over the weekend, they'd knocked off ½ of the remaining firewood and only a quarter of the logs remained to be sawn, split and delivered and stacked. Each cabin that already had a firewood supply getting about 5 cords of firewood in addition to what they and the empty buildings and building sites were getting whatever it took to make sure they had 10 cords on hand.

Monday through Friday, the 3 old men made a pretty good dent in the sawing and splitting. On Saturday, the others managed to saw and split the remaining logs and the 3 old geezers took both Saturday and Sunday off. They were, to be perfectly honest, pooped. Randy and the construction crew had cabin 35 framed and closed in and the 4 walls to cabin 36 erected. Randy told everyone on Sunday that he and his crew would work 6 days a week on framing and closing until they got caught up and that the others could start in finishing of the interior of cabin 33. Once they got caught up, everyone would work of the interior of the cabins on Saturdays.

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Sunday, December 7, 2008... Year 4, Day 47 PT... Day 1,143 PT...

By Saturday evening, Cabin 36 was finished and Cabin 37 was framed and the roof trusses secured in place. The people, who had been cutting firewood on Saturdays, put in the insulation and completed the plumbing and wiring of cabin 33. This allowed them to set up an electrical heater to keep cabin 33 warm. They knocked off a little early in remembrance of the attack on Pearl Harbor, 67 years before on this very date. Only Ron had been alive when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, but he was most certainly too young at the time to remember.

The Deputies had found some likely candidates for Liberty Village and they spent Sunday afternoon interviewing the couples. Among the group were an electrician and a plumber, some people Randy vaguely knew. These two couples ended up getting invited and were explained all of the rules that governed Liberty Village before they made up their minds to move in. Both families accepted and Randy said that as soon as they moved in, the plumber could start by putting the plumbing in the closed in cabins and the electrician could start wiring them. Maybe, they could end up finishing early, but only if they didn't experience any problems before the last cabin was slated to be finished.

Cabin 23: Best, Mark, Doreen, Jacob and Ruth. (Electrician.)

Cabin 24: Rhodes, Donald, Janice, Stephan and Judy. (Plumber.)

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Sunday, December 14, 2008... Year 4, Day 54 PT... Day 1,150 PT...

Cabin 37 was done and Cabin 38 was framed, roofed and had the solar panels in by Saturday evening. Mark and Don had moved their families in on Tuesday and the two of them had spent 4 days plumbing, insulating and wiring. Cabins 34 through 37 were all insulated, wired and plumbed by Saturday night. Cabin 33 was all done except for the finishing touches like wiring in the solar panels and fixtures and installing the appliances and furniture. They would most definitely finish ahead of schedule at this rate. Both of the community buildings held dances on Saturday nights and the older community building still had the Sunday morning church service for those who wanted to attend. The simple design of the cabins made the interior work all rather simple. The interior walls were hammered together on the floor and set in place. They were anchored to the floor with a ramset and toe nailed to the trusses. All interior walls were insulated with R-11 insulation to provide a little sound reduction.

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Sunday, December 14, 2008... Year 4, Day 54 PT... Day 1,150 PT...

Cabins 37 and 38 were finished by Saturday night, putting Randy and crew back on schedule. Mark and Don also had the two cabins wired and plumbed and had helped on the interior of cabin 34. Cabin 33 was ready to occupy and even the gun rack was stocked with 3 rifles and a shotgun. During the week, the Deputies ran across a cache of .22 Ruger 10/22 rifles and magazines and each cabin that needed one was also now equipped with a .22 rifle. Sheriff Gary Penrod had graciously supplied the extra 12-gauge shotguns. They were well worn but in excellent operating condition. The only thing missing to round out the cabin gun racks were additional M1A rifles, but Sergeant thought he had a lead on some semi-automatic only M14's. They had been through an armory rebuild and were, according to what he heard, well coated in Cosmoline. That would give The Three Amigos something to do, getting the rifles into ready-to-fire condition.

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Sunday, December 21, 2008... Year 4, Day 61 PT... Day 1,157 PT...

Since this was the week of Christmas, they didn't start Cabin 39. Everyone took one day off to go shopping and the construction crew was close to having Cabin 34 ready to occupy. By Saturday evening, it was generally presumed that the cabin would be ready to occupy. Of course Randy and his crew was again 1 cabin behind schedule, but except for New Year's, there wasn't another holiday that anyone intended to observe until Easter and that came on Sunday, April 12th in 2009. After New Year's, they would go back to framing and closing 6 days a week until they were once again caught up.

Did you ever wonder why most contractors use an inexpensive or medium grade of linoleum in tract houses? One reason is cost, of course, but the other reason is that inexpensive linoleum is rather easier to repair than the higher priced stuff. Gary and Sharon had replaced the linoleum in their Palmdale home with the finest linoleum Mannington

had to offer. Great linoleum, but it had a couple of problems. Firstly, the darned stuff shrunk over time, opening the seams, even if the linoleum was cemented to the concrete. Unlike the cheap linoleum, the seam sealer was just that, a seam sealer. Less expensive linoleum actually melted under an application of seam sealer eliminating the seam entirely if the linoleum were properly installed. Secondly, the expensive stuff wasn't nearly as cut proof as Mannington claimed. And, unlike the inexpensive linoleum where the fix was a dab of linoleum cement under the cut and a dab of sealer to melt the tear back together, you could do nothing but repair the tears and the repairs showed.

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Sunday, December 28, 2008... Year 4, Day 68 PT... Day 1,164 PT...

Cabin 34 was indeed ready to occupy, but with New Years, they planned to do the interior work in Cabin 35 in the days before and after the final holiday before Easter. By the greatest of good fortune Steve had run across a survival oriented family and the husband and wife were carpet and linoleum installers. They still had to do the interview to be sure, but it ended up with the couple being invited to occupy Cabin 25. This particular gentleman had an excellent gun collection and when they moved in on Monday and Tuesday, he returned the weapons that were standard issue to the armory. After they moved in, the couple laid the linoleum in Cabin 35 before the holiday and spent Friday and Saturday making much needed repairs to the floors of other cabins.

Randy announced a minor change in their approach. Henceforth, the framing crew would spend 6 days a week on a cabin and install the insulation leaving the walls ready for wiring and any plumbing. This change would mean that the final cabin wouldn't be done until Friday July 3, 2009, but the interior of the cabins would be finished that much sooner, possibly by the first of August. He was looking around a bit himself, hoping to find some military veterans who were in the building trades, preferably carpenters, who were out of work.

Cabin 25: Hollister, Donald, Marie, Charles and James. (Flooring installers.)

◦

Sunday, January 4, 2009... Year 4, Day 74 PT... Day 1,171 PT...

Cabin 35 was classified as ready to occupy, leaving them with 10 finished but unoccupied cabins. Professional athletics hadn't resumed a full schedule and wouldn't until the baseball season. There were about $\frac{1}{3}$ as many professional teams as one might well imagine. All of the sports: baseball, basketball and football were down to a single league. Times change. Automobile racing didn't appear to be resuming anytime soon because of the ongoing fuel shortage. Oil out of the Middle East was running about \$165-\$170 a barrel, making for ongoing gasoline and other fuel shortages. Mostly other, because there simply weren't enough supplies to repair all of the cars with fried ignition

systems. And, by now, the tires and hoses had rotted of many of those cars. Synthetic rubber is also petroleum based, if I remember correctly. Tires were therefore quite expensive because industries that produced other types of synthetic rubbers were not yet up and running. At least, that was the word going around.

The world was becoming a vastly different place than it had been before WW III. No one in the Northern hemisphere had truly escaped the effects of the World War and with the Middle Eastern nations operating in a block with Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) there was trouble looming on the far horizon. The United States had reopened all of the lower yield wells and the second oilfield in Alaska was well on its way to delivering oil to North America. In the interest of getting a portion of the oil, Canada had funded and was building a trans-Canadian pipeline. The environmentalists were raising holy hell, but they were still driving fossil fuel burning means of transportation.

◦

Sunday, January 11, 2009... Year 4, Day 82 PT... Day 1,178 PT...

Cabin 39 was closed in, plumbed, wired, the floor covering installed and almost finished. They went ahead and worked Sunday afternoon and were able to classify it as ready to occupy. Cabins 36-38 would be worked on in the evenings and hopefully they would be ready to occupy in about 3 weeks' time. As of the moment, they were 2 cabins behind the original schedule but if they got those 3 cabins finished during the evenings of the next 3 weeks, when the project was finished on the 4th of July weekend, all 64 cabins would be ready to occupy. Randy had cajoled 4 more construction workers, all carpenters, to apply for membership in the community and 3 of the 4 families had been accepted. The 4th individual was advised that he was being rejected because of his severe drinking problem. There were several AA members within the community, he was told, and if he wanted to get his act together, he was more than welcome to reapply. He wasn't quite ready.

Cabin 26: Jackson, Paul, Denise, David and Laura (Carpenter.)

Cabin 27: Leto, Sam, Joyce, Samuel, Paul, Sandra and Susanne. (Carpenter.)

Cabin 28: Christensen, John "Jack", Marion, Cynthia and Rachel. (Carpenter.)

◦

Sunday, January 18, 2009... Year 4, Day 89 PT... Day 1,185 PT...

Cabins 36-38 and 40 were now classified as ready to occupy. They might be two cabins behind, but with 3 journeyman carpenters, the odds were that they'd get back on the original schedule. They were also relieved of the burden of working nights to finish the 3 cabins. Randy suggested and everyone agreed that if they used the 3 new carpenters as a separate rough in crew, they could not only finish by the original schedule but just possible by the end of May. Paul, Sam and Jack had worked together for some years

and as a team, they knew each other and could, by themselves, frame and close a house in a single week, including the interior walls, but excluding the insulation.

Installing the rolled fiberglass insulation really isn't that major of a chore and amongst the plumber, electrician and floor installers, they could pick up the slack for the second construction crew and still plumb, wire and floor 2 homes a week. The prospect of completing 2 homes a week from now on was looking very good indeed. Late in the afternoon, John Quincy and his family showed up. John hadn't had a drink in 4 days and was still pretty shaky. When he asked if they'd reconsider, Sergeant, Marty, Ron, Clarence and Gary drug him down to community building number one and he attended his first AA meeting. The family was granted provisional admittance to Liberty Village on the condition that John continued to attend AA meetings.

Cabin 29: Quincy, John, Mary, Roseanne and Lynn. (Carpenter.)

Big John – Chapter 36 – Early Spring and Trouble

Cabin 01: Barranca, Steve and Sandy, Jimmy and Ruth.

Cabin 02: Wilson, Marty, Selma, Sissy and Marty.

Cabin 03: Rowland, Howard 'Sergeant', Beth, Sandra and Billy.

Cabin 04: Douglas, Jack, Moira, Jennifer and Joey.

Cabin 05: Jenkins, Randy, Belinda, Randy and Sarah.

Cabin 06: Olsen, Gary and Sharon.

Cabin 07: Olsen, Damon, Britney, Aaron and Erik.

Cabin 08: Olsen, Derek, Mary, DJ, Elizabeth, Joshua and Thomas.

Cabin 09: Colvin, David, Lorrie, Josh, Justin, Jason, Jesse, Jeffery.

Cabin 10: Moon, Amy, Audrey and Udell Jr.

Cabin 11: Green, Ron and Linda.

Cabin 12: Adams, Mark and Paula.

Cabin 13: Matthews, Bobby Joe, Jennifer, Bobby, Sheila and Jennifer.

Cabin 14: Green, John, Kevin and Brenda (brothers and sister).

Cabin 15: Rawlings, Clarence and Lucy.

Cabin 16: Rawlings, Clarence Jr., Denise, Fred and Lucy.

Cabin 17: Rawlings, James, Tamara and Clarence.

Cabin 18: Peedan, Christopher, Patricia, Matthew and Daniel.

Cabin 19: Cervantes, Manny, Maria, Manuel and Maria.

Cabin 20: Cervantes, Jose, Maureen, David and Maureen.

Cabin 21: Hewlett, John, Lynn, Susan and Rachael.

Cabin 22: Pelham, Robert, Loretta, Christopher and Shaun.

Cabin 23: Best, Mark, Doreen, Jacob and Ruth. (Electrician.)

Cabin 24: Rhodes, Donald, Janice, Stephan and Judy. (Plumber.)

Cabin 25: Hollister, Donald, Marie, Charles and James. (Flooring installers.)

Cabin 26: Jackson, Paul, Denise, David and Laura (Carpenter.)

Cabin 27: Leto, Sam, Joyce, Samuel, Paul, Sandra and Susanne. (Carpenter.)

Cabin 28: Christensen, John "Jack", Marion, Cynthia and Rachel. (Carpenter.)

Cabin 29: Quincy, John, Mary, Roseanne and Lynn. (Carpenter.)
Cabin 30: - Cabin 40: Empty
Cabin 41: - Cabin 64: Under construction

All of the men in cabins 23-29 had prior military service in the Army or Marines. Maybe John Quincy wasn't quite ready to hold a gun just yet, but given some time and those 5 recovering drunks working on him and he'd come around and be an asset to the community or be gone. Most recovering alcoholics will go out of their way to help someone to get sober and stay that way. Unfortunately, not everyone is ready when they think they are. However, when that happens, the guy eventually gets sober or dies. John didn't really stand much of a chance of slipping, not with 5 sponsors. Then again, the liquor in the old community building wasn't under lock and key, either. John had to do his part, too. The hardest part was surrendering your life and your will to a God of your understanding.

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Sunday, January 25, 2009... Year 4, Day 96 PT... Day 1,192 PT...

Cabins 41 and 42 were now finished and ready to occupy. The Three Amigos had one hell of a time with the Cosmoline in the beginning, but they finally had all of the semi-automatic only M14's cleared and ready to go. Then again, they hadn't worked all that hard on cleaning the guns. It turned out that Ron knew of a place in Laguna Hills that used to sell a Cosmoline Remover so they made a little road trip to Coast Detail Supplies. Over the course of the next 11 weeks, the 22 cabins were finished and ready for occupancy.

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Sunday, April 12, 2009... Year 4, Day 173 PT... Day 1,270 PT... Easter Sunday...

Cabins 30 through 64 were completed, furnished and empty giving them 35 empty cabins they could either rent to permanent residents or to people looking for somewhere to get away for a weekend. The firearms had been returned to the armory just in case they ended up renting a cabin to a visitor instead of a new resident. The horses and cattle were on the second terrace and the hogs and poultry on the highest terrace. When they reconstructed the buildings for the livestock they planned to face them south and install extra solar panels to provide power for the buildings and the grid. Batteries and inverters weren't a problem; they had plenty of those after The Three Amigos had gone scavenging.

In addition to the many other things The Three Amigos had found, they'd come upon several trailer loads of canning supplies. The main things they wanted were additional lids and jars. They had both in abundance. Once those livestock buildings were moved, there would be lots of additional room for gardening on the lower cabin level and a bit of extra room on the highest terrace to raise crops to feed the livestock. The hogs and

poultry were going in on the east end of the third terrace right up near the stand tanks. The smell of money was sort of getting to them and the prevailing wind was out of the west.

"I don't believe that we're going to be able to plant enough crops to feed all of the livestock we have now," Sergeant suggested during the Sunday afternoon men's get together.

"Maybe we shouldn't bother," Jack suggested. "It's not that much trouble to run up to the San Joaquin Valley and haul back hay and feed. Maybe we should put in a third storage building up on the 3rd terrace to store the feed."

"We can store the hay in the loft of the barn, Jack, and bagged feed in the storage building," Marty remarked. "I was thinking that we should consider putting in a small silo to store the rest."

"We need to find a farmer to join this community," Steve suggested. "None of us are really up to managing the livestock we have."

"Actually, what we need is a farmer, a Vet, and a combination medical doctor/dentist," Jack replied.

"I wrote about those combination doctors in one of my stories," Gary said. "I have a list somewhere of the doctors in southern California who had both degrees. There weren't very many of them. I'll see if I can find the list."

"Look on your computer, partner," Ron laughed. "You have your whole life stored on that box."

"If we do put in an extra storage building, Jack," Marty pointed out, "It would put us in a positive power position if we had enough batteries to store the power."

"Do you want we should go scavenging again?" Ron asked. "We're sort of running out of abandoned communities, you know."

"I hear that there are lots of areas in Los Angeles that people are afraid to go into because of some residual radiation," Sergeant pointed out. "Some of those isotopes have pretty long half-lives."

"So you want to send the old men just in case the places are still hot, huh?" Clarence asked.

"I brought it up because some of the places that people won't go aren't really all that hot, Clarence," Sergeant responded. "Anyway, there's no shortage of survey meters or Geiger counters around this place."

“Make up a list of what you want and we’ll see what we can do,” Gary suggested.

Shopping List:

Storage Building for Livestock Feed
Livestock Feed (Poultry/Hogs/Cattle/Horses)
Deep Cycle Batteries
Inverters
Solar Panels
1 Farmer
1 Doctor/Dentist
1 Veterinarian
Supplies for the community buildings:
• soft drink syrup for soda machines
• CO₂ canisters
• Popcorn and Oil
• DVD Movies
• Adult Beverages

◦

Monday, April 13, 2009... Year 4, Day 174 PT... Day 1,271 PT...

The Three Amigos added a few things of their own to the shopping list:

Cigarettes
Medical Supplies and equipment
Portable Medical Clinic
Groceries, esp. Tea Bags, Coffee and staples
Kathy Ireland

Manny, Jose and Derek would be helping with their scavenging efforts. They hooked onto 2 tractor-trailer rigs they had sitting over by the fuel depot and headed down the mountain. You did notice that Kathy Ireland was the last thing on their list, right? They re-prioritized the list and the last 4 items were the people and Ms. Eye Candy was still last. After their first day of shopping, the list was greatly reduced to:

Storage Building for Livestock Feed
Livestock Feed (Poultry/Hogs/Cattle/Horses)
Medical Supplies and equipment
Portable Medical Clinic
1 Farmer
1 Doctor/Dentist
1 Veterinarian
Kathy Ireland

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Tuesday, April 14, 2009... Year 4, Day 175 PT... Day 1,272 PT...

On the second day of their scavenging, they took care of the storage building for the livestock feed and the feed itself. They spotted what looked to be a complete portable medical clinic with both medical and dental facilities. They scratched Kathy Ireland from the list because she and Dr. Owens were nowhere to be found. They planned to go back down the mountain on Wednesday and pick up that portable medical clinic and all of the medical supplies they could find that were still of any use. Randy already had the slabs in for the new livestock buildings and the extra storage building.

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Saturday, April 18, 2009... Year 4, Day 179 PT... Day 1,275 PT...

“We have more manure than we have ground to till it into,” Ron observed.

“Maybe we can figure out some way to compost it faster and convert it to top soil,” Clarence suggested.

“All I’m trying to say is that the village is full of stuff,” Ron countered. “And it’s all piled on the upwind side.”

“Did you find the list of doctor/dentists?” Jack asked.

“I did, but the next trick will be to find one of them still alive,” Gary replied. “And then, all you have to do is convince him or her to give up a lucrative practice and move to Liberty Village.”

“We’ll make them an offer they can’t refuse,” Marty suggested.

“They must have showed ‘The Godfather’ on TV last night,” Ron commented.

What Marty was really suggesting was that the doctor/dentist would get a free cabin and the portable medical clinic to use. The clinic was a set of 4 portable buildings, one housing a lab and X-Ray, the second a surgery, the third a hospital ward and the fourth examination rooms and a dental room complete with dental X-Ray. Each of the 4 buildings was made up of two sections, not unlike the portable classrooms a lot of the schools used. Apparently the only reason it was still sitting where it was had to do with it being in what was considered to be a ‘hot zone’. With the livestock and buildings gone from the west end of Liberty Village, there was ample room to erect the clinic. The building didn’t even need slabs.

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Sunday, April 26, 2009... Year 4, Day 187 PT... Day 1,283 PT...

It seems that Mort had sold off all of his hogs and was looking for someplace to live. His kids were all grown and he and the missus had an offer on the farm. You remember Mort, right? He's not the one named Jack who sold them beef. And no, Mort didn't know where they could find a Vet, a doctor/dentist or even Kathy Ireland, but if they found her let him, but not the missus, know. Mort said his last name was Rogers, not Carter, and he didn't figure you could go to hell just for looking.

Cabin 30: Rogers, Mortimer 'Mort' and Helen. (Farmer.)

Mort brought some of his farm equipment giving them a tractor, plow, tandem disk, twine hay baler, pull combine, manure spreader and mounted 2 row corn picker as well as 3 wagons. They could tow the wagons by removing the ball assembly from their pickup trailer hitches. Mort also told them where they could find an abandoned farm with a small silo they could dismantle and move to Liberty Village. He and Helen were given a cabin in exchange for the use of their farm equipment and his labor.

Mort had enough farm equipment to farm about a quarter section. They couldn't go east, but to the west the land was moderately flat if all the trees were cut down and stumps removed. Mort said that it might go 80 acres but with the small amount of live-stock they had, 80 acres was more than enough. All of which served to give them a new project for the summer of 2009, clearing 80 acres of land. That's a lot of firewood and a whole lot of stumps. But, they had a dozer remember? Plus, more than their fair share of explosives.

The feeding needs of a swine should be the following: 2-7 gallons of water per day per 100 pounds, grains for energy containing 75-90% of total feed ration, protein 14-15% of ration for growing, finishing period, 16-18% for growing pigs under 100 pounds, 12-14% for finishing hogs over 170 pounds. Vitamins and minerals should be provided as a mix or by access to pasture grasses, roots, soil, or sunshine. Vitamins A, D, E, K, B-Series and other vitamins plus iron, calcium, phosphorus and other minerals are needed. Salt is required in a feed ration of 0.24% of feed ration maximum and fat should only be 10% of the ration.

Basically what Mort told them was that whatever they put together for cattle feed would be fine for the hogs. Plus, they could grow some alfalfa for the cattle and horses. The following summer, they could grow alfalfa for hay, plus some corn, oats and barley for feed. Properly handled, they could grind the feed and store it in the silo. They make up an all-purpose grain mix and he'd add supplements as needed, like molasses for the horses. Horses had a sweet tooth, he claimed. They needed different salt blocks for the cattle and horses but he said he knew what to get. Kind of funny that they'd managed all of this time not knowing a lot about feeding animals, huh? Well, they been using sacked feeds and buying hay, but now that they were clearing 80 acres to grow their own, they needed someone who had a little more knowledge on the subject.

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Monday, May 4, 2009... Year 4, Day 195 PT... Day 1,291 PT...

It was TSHTF Day; they just didn't know it yet. It was time for event number 7 of the 9 they were speculating they were going to get. Because geologically recent volcanic activity in an area is the best guide to forecasting future eruptions, scientists study the lava flows, ash, and other deposits from past eruptions. Volcanoes in the Lassen area tend to erupt infrequently, and may be inactive for periods lasting centuries or even millennia. The most recent eruptions in the Lassen area were the relatively small events that occurred at Lassen Peak between 1914 and 1917. The most recent large eruption produced Chaos Crags about 1,100 years ago. Such large eruptions in the Lassen area have an average recurrence interval of about 10,000 years. However, the geologic history of the Lassen area indicates that volcanism there is episodic, having periods of relatively frequent eruptions separated by long quiet intervals. For example, the last large event before Chaos Crags eruption was the one that built Lassen Peak 27,000 years ago.

On May 22, 1915, an explosive eruption at Lassen Peak, California, the southernmost active volcano in the Cascade Range, devastated nearby areas and rained volcanic ash as far away as 200 miles to the east. This explosion was the most powerful in a 1914-17 series of eruptions that were the last to occur in the Cascades before the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens, Washington. Recent work by scientists with the US Geological Survey (USGS) in cooperation with the National Park Service is shedding new light on these eruptions.

Although extremely unlikely today, very large eruptions have occurred in the Lassen region in the distant past. For example, about 600,000 years ago there was an eruption 50 times larger than the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. Because some winds at the time of that eruption were blowing southward, ash several inches thick was deposited as far south as the San Francisco Bay area. A similar eruption today could affect communities anywhere in northern California and northwestern Nevada, depending on wind direction. Even a light dusting of volcanic ash can close roads and seriously disrupt communications and utilities during and for many weeks after an eruption.

Just keep telling yourself that Lassen Peak wasn't going to blow. On Monday May 4, 2009 the wind shifted to out of the north-northwest. The 1915 eruption produced a 200-mile ash field. The event 600,000 years ago was 50 times larger. The 2009 eruption was 100 times larger than the eruption 600,000 years ago and the eruption was very explosive. This blast was towards the southeast and produced a volume of ash not seen in several hundred thousand years. And of course, it happened late in the afternoon after a high-pressure zone stalled off the Pacific coast.

The distance from Mt. Lassen to The Village was on the cusp of 500 miles. Those poor people up north where they'd had the tsunami back in 2005 were probably thinking it was the end of the world. Fortunately the pyroclastic flow was towards the southeast.

Still, they were going to get one hell of a dusting of ash, regardless of the way the wind was blowing and everything else. Sure didn't get much news out of that area for some reason, probably due to demands on the time of the reporters.

They faintly felt the shock of the eruption in the form of an earthquake even 500 miles away. That shock lasted for quite some time, causing them to stop clearing the land to the west of The Village and head for the community building to find out where the earthquake was. When they all got there, they seemed to have beaten the news. But, if they'd felt the temblor in Liberty Village, it wouldn't be too long before those LA TV stations that were back on the air began reporting about some minor earthquake up in someplace like Ridgecrest.

We interrupt our regular broadcast to bring you the following report, the announcer on KABC began.

"Here it is," Clarence announced.

"Shhhh..." was what he heard back.

At 3:14pm Pacific Daylight Time, a massive eruption struck Lassen Peak in northern California according to Dr. Lucy Jones, supervisor of the US Geological Survey office in Pasadena, the announcer continued. We join a report in progress from the USGS in Pasadena.

We've had indications that a magma dome was building at Lassen Peak for quite some time, Dr. Jones related. However, despite the lessons learned from the massive eruption of Mt. St. Helens, we believed that we still had time to issue a final warning. Obviously, we were in error. We did clear the area to the southeast of the building dome in the belief that when it did erupt, the pyroclastic flow would be in that direction. Because of this, the loss of life has been limited. It is just too soon to say what the effect of the eruption is, but given the wind direction and the scope of the eruption, we should see some volcanic ash here in Pasadena.

"I'm going outside and watch for the rocks to start falling," Clarence announced as he got up and headed for the door.

"Shhhh..."

"Ron," Gary whispered, "If a rock could fly all the way from Lassen Peak to Liberty Village, it would take the better part of an hour to get here."

"Shhhh..."

"Outside," Ron whispered back and headed for the door.

"See anything yet Clarence?" Ron asked.

“Not yet, but I’m looking hard,” Clarence replied.

“Gary says it will take about an hour for any rocks to get here,” Ron explained.

“He’s been wrong before,” Clarence shook his head.

“According to what I read about the Mt. St. Helen’s eruption, Clarence,” Gary responded, “Some of the rocks were supersonic but barely. I doubt you’ll see any rocks, but if you do, it won’t be until around 4:00.”

“Does this make 7?” Clarence asked.

“Yep. This makes 7,” Gary replied. “It could also include number 8 if it triggers some reaction out of the Long Valley Caldera. I figure that the eruption of Lassen Peak was somewhere between a 6 and a 7.”

“Didn’t you write a story about the Long Valley Caldera?” Ron asked.

“I wrote about it in my story called *The Unprepared*, Ron,” Gary said. “But in that story I had a meteor strike in Victorville trigger the eruption of the Caldera.”

“What meteor?” Clarence asked. “Where do you see a meteor?”

“Hu’s on first, Clarence,” Ron stated.

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“Are the three of you out here looking for falling rocks?” Steve asked when the Deputies arrived and saw The Three Amigos.

“Clarence is,” Gary said, “We’re just keeping him company. Any news?”

“We have a 30mph wind out of the north-northwest,” Sergeant said, “So I don’t expect we’ll begin seeing any ash until around 8am tomorrow.”

“Do you really believe we’ll even see any ash?” Ron asked. “That’s 500 miles away.”

“The latest reports put the eruption at a 7, fellas,” Sergeant replied, “So it is entirely possible. This makes 7, you know.”

“We know,” Gary replied. “Is that an official 7 or just speculative?”

“Official,” Sergeant replied. “Why aren’t you inside watching all of this on TV?”

“We’ll catch the 3rd or 4th rerun,” Ron laughed.

“Sheriff Penrod suggested that we activate the shelter until the dust from this thing settles,” Jack related.

“We’d better get Mort and get the livestock sheltered, then,” Ron replied. “We can’t have anything happening to Gary’s horse.”

“You mean his gelding named Salina?” Jack chuckled.

“I changed his name to Rocky,” Gary snapped.

“Somehow, I figured you’d change its name to Silver,” Jack replied.

“It was zinc, not silver,” Gary repeated after a moment of reflection.

“I guess that Hi-Ho Zinc, away doesn’t cut it, huh?” Jack laughed out loud.

Gary didn’t reply. When you’re 5’4 and Mr. 6’6 makes a joke you’d better laugh or play dumb. Gary had a lot of practice paying dumb, so he just acted naturally; which was all an act to begin with, if the truth were told. Anyway, they had all night to get the stock under shelter so there really wasn’t a huge rush. There was plenty of time for supper and to catch the 3rd or 4th rebroadcast of the news. Clarence stayed out until dark and then gave up because he couldn’t see anything soon enough, he figured, to dodge it. They penned up the livestock in the barn and hog house late in the evening and Steve passed out some of the N-95 facemasks in case anyone was late in getting to the shelter. The word was that everyone should be there by not later than 7:30am.

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Tuesday, May 5, 2009... Year 4, Day 196 PT... Day 1,292 PT...

It was nice when you could see a disaster coming from 500 miles away. Well, unless you lived in Florida and the disaster was worse when it got there than when you first saw it 500 miles away. It would be hurricane season soon, June 1 to November 30. Some folks were projecting that until the global warming phenomena was over, the storms would just keep getting worse. They could see the ash cloud as it made its way south carried by those 30mph winds. Some of the LA TV stations were getting feeds from affiliates and the ash was getting thinner but still approaching. It didn’t appear that they were going to have any problem with disaster number 7 in Liberty Village. But, better safe than sorry, right?

Some people just didn’t know when to keep their mouths shut. You know, it’s that business about God having a sense of humor and giving you what you ask for, right? Maybe God wasn’t listening as well as He should have been, or maybe He was and He had a sense of humor like old Gar-Bear’s. I won’t keep you in suspense; the Long Valley Caldera blew just about 23 hours after the Mt. Lassen’s explosive eruption. The difference

was they were of about the same intensity but the Long Valley Caldera was: 1. Much larger; and, 2. Much closer. Eight down and one to go. It was a good thing Clarence wasn't outside looking at the sky to see if any rocks fell because a few smaller ones actually did. They didn't hit anything, praise the Lord, but they fell just the same. The drill didn't turn out to be much different than a nuclear disaster, but there wasn't any radiation and they could get up the hill to feed the livestock.

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Wednesday, May 13, 2009... Year 4, Day 204 PT... Day 1,300 PT...

And, of course, you didn't have to stay in the shelter for a full 2 weeks either. They came out 8 days after going in. Everything was covered with about 8" of volcanic ash but there were no injuries except to their garden and crops. It did sort of solve the problem of what to do with all the manure. Mort loaded it up after they finished clearing off the ash and distributed the ash to the fields and spread a layer of manure over all of the ash.

I suppose most of you are thinking about one of those garden tillers, aren't you? What we're talking about there is one of those CCM SR-240 Super Heavy Duty 90" Rotary Tillers with a 22" scroll diameter that you needed 140 PTO HP to operate. Mort spread the manure while Jack and Marty went up to the San Joaquin Valley and borrowed both the tiller and tractor from Jack. You remember Jack, don't you? He raises beef. Mort made 3 passes with the tiller and by the time he was done, that soil was pretty soft and very well mixed. Volcanic ash makes a pretty good soil once you convert it to humus. Hell, look at the way things grow in Hawaii. Once they had the soil well mixed, they hosed it down really good to settle it and then rotary tilled it one last time after it dried enough. While it was drying, Mort tilled the 20 acres of the timber area they had cleared just to break up the soil a little. Mort was done by Saturday and on Sunday Jack and Marty returned the tractor and tiller to Cattleman Jack. They told him they'd be back to borrow it again if that was ok, but first they had to clear the timber off of 60 acres.

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Monday, May 18, 2009... Year 4, Day 209 PT... Day 1,305 PT...

While Mort got the 20 acres disked, dragged and ready to plant into corn, Gary, Ron and Clarence seeded the 2nd and third terraces with grass seed so they'd have a good crop of grass for the cattle and horses. You're not supposed to need to disk and drag after you've rototilled a field, but Mort had been in a bit of a hurry to return the tiller to Jack and hadn't done a very good job with the rotary tiller on those 20 acres. Just to further complicate matters, timberland that is turned into farmland needs a pretty good application of manure to enrich the soil enough to be able to grow a good corn crop. But they were essentially out of manure. What little bit they'd accumulated needed to be used on the gardens. Mort ended up planting 20 acres of soybeans instead.

By this time, California had experienced about every type of disaster that they could expect for a tornado or hurricane but they don't really have hurricanes on the west coast and tornados are exceeding rare. They call hurricanes cyclones and tornados are called windspouts, landspouts or waterspouts.

Top Ten Reasons Hurricane Season is Like Christmas

10. Decorating the house (boarding up windows).
9. Dragging out boxes that haven't been used since last season (camping gear, flashlights).
8. Last minute shopping in crowded stores.
7. Regular TV shows pre-empted for "specials".
6. Family coming to stay with you.
5. Family and friends from out-of-state calling.
4. Buying food you don't normally buy ... and in large quantities.
3. Days off from work.
2. Candles.
1. And the number one reason Hurricane Season is like Christmas... At some point you know you're going to have a tree in your house!

Big John – Chapter 37 – Number Nine

The most obvious hazard facing the folks at Liberty Village simply hadn't occurred to anyone. This particular hazard causes, in the United States, approximately \$3.5 billion (year 2001 dollars) in damage, and kills between 25 and 50 people annually. World-wide, this hazard occurs and causes thousands of casualties and billions in monetary losses annually. Let's think about what it might be, shall we? In January of 2005, one of the events in southern California took several lives. Ten people were killed and 14 were injured. Of the 166 homes in the community, fifteen were destroyed and 16 more were tagged by the county as uninhabitable. One of these events was responsible for the May 18, 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens.

"Mount St. Helens is an active stratovolcano in Skamania County, Washington, in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. It is located 96 miles south of Seattle and 53 miles northeast of Portland, Oregon. The mountain is part of the Cascade Range and was initially known as Louwala-Clough which means "smoking or fire mountain" in the language of the Klickitats. It was named for British diplomat 1st Baron St. Helens as a result of a late 18th century British survey of the area.

"It is most famous for a catastrophic eruption on May 18, 1980. That eruption was the most deadly and economically destructive volcanic eruption in the history of the United States. 57 people were killed, and 200 homes, 47 bridges, 15 miles of railways and 185 miles of highway were destroyed. The eruption blew the top of the mountain off, reducing its summit from 9,677 feet to 8,364 feet in elevation and replacing it with a mile-wide horseshoe-shaped crater.

"Like most of the other volcanoes in the Cascade Range, St. Helens is a great cone of rubble, consisting of lava rock interlayered with ash, pumice and other deposits. Volcanic cones of this internal structure are called composite cones or stratovolcanoes. Mount St. Helens includes layers of basalt and andesite through which several domes of dacite lava have erupted. The largest of the dacite domes formed the previous summit; another formed Goat Rocks dome on the northern flank. These were destroyed in St. Helens' 1980 eruption."

"Lahar is an Indonesian term that describes a hot or cold mixture of water and rock fragments flowing down the slopes of a volcano and (or) river valleys. When moving, a lahar looks like a mass of wet concrete that carries rock debris ranging in size from clay to boulders more than 10 meters in diameter. Lahars vary in size and speed. Small lahars less than a few meters wide and several centimeters deep may flow a few meters per second. Large lahars hundreds of meters wide and tens of meters deep can flow several tens of meters per second – much too fast for people to outrun.

"As a lahar rushes downstream from a volcano, its size, speed, and the amount of water and rock debris it carries constantly change. The beginning surge of water and rock debris often erodes rocks and vegetation from the side of a volcano and along the river valley it enters. This initial flow can also incorporate water from melting snow and ice (if

present) and the river it overruns. By eroding rock debris and incorporating additional water, lahars can easily grow to more than 10 times their initial size. But as a lahar moves farther away from a volcano, it will eventually begin to lose its heavy load of sediment and decrease in size.

“Eruptions may trigger one or more lahars directly by quickly melting snow and ice on a volcano or ejecting water from a crater lake. More often, lahars are formed by intense rainfall during or after an eruption—rainwater can easily erode loose volcanic rock and soil on hillsides and in river valleys. Some of the largest lahars begin as landslides of saturated and hydrothermally altered rock on the flank of a volcano or adjacent hill slopes. Landslides are triggered by eruptions, earthquakes, precipitation, or the unceasing pull of gravity on the volcano.

“Lahars almost always occur on or near stratovolcanoes because these volcanoes tend to erupt explosively and their tall, steep cones are either snow covered, topped with a crater lake, constructed of weakly consolidated rock debris that is easily eroded, or internally weakened by hot hydrothermal fluids. Lahars are also common from the snow- and ice-covered shield volcanoes in Iceland where eruptions of fluid basalt lava frequently occur beneath huge glaciers.”

“Without warning at 8:32 AM a magnitude 5.1 earthquake centered directly below the north slope triggered that part of the mountain to slide an estimated 7–20 seconds after the shock. One of the largest landslides in recorded history, the slide traveled at 110 to 155 miles per hour and moved across Spirit Lake’s west arm; part of it hit a 1,150 foot high ridge about 6 miles north. Some of the slide spilled over the ridge but most of it moved 13 miles down the North Fork Toutle River, filling its valley up to 600 feet deep with avalanche debris. An area of about 24 square miles was covered and the total volume of the deposit was about 0.7 cubic mile.”

“Most of St. Helens’ former north side became a rubble deposit 17 miles long, averaging 150 feet thick; the slide was thicker a mile below Spirit Lake and thinnest at its western margin. All the water in Spirit Lake was temporarily displaced by the landslide, sending 600 foot high waves crashing into a ridge north of the lake and adding 295 feet of new avalanche debris above the old lakebed, raising its surface level by about 200 feet. As the water moved back into its basin it pulled thousands of trees felled by a super-heated wall of volcanic gas and searing ash and rock that overtook the landslide seconds before.”

The hazard being referred to is the Landslide. And, the residents of Liberty Village obviously knew that it could happen. After terracing the mountain, they’d seeded grass to keep the soil in place. And when the Long Valley Caldera blew its top, they’d spread the ash, tilled in soil and manure and reseeded. But for all of their preparations and precautions, they’d made one little mistake. The slope between the terraces was just a little too steep. It shouldn’t have been a big deal; each terrace was only 20’ above the previous.

o

Saturday, May 23, 2009... Year 4, Day 214 PT... Day 1,310 PT...

"It's been raining all week," Ron observed. "I don't know if that's good or bad."

"Well, it might be good, Ron," Clarence replied. "It's such a gentle rain that all of the water is soaking in instead of running off. We should have a great crop of grass sprouting in a few days."

"I don't know about that fellas, God has a sense of humor, but Mother Nature doesn't," Gary joined in the conversation.

"We seeded grass, Gary," Clarence pointed out. "That should prevent any mudslides."

"We also have cut 20 acres of timber to the west and Heaven only knows how much timber to the north," Gary disagreed. "I think the long roots of the trees that were harvested had a lot to do with holding the soil on the mountain."

"Ah, you worry too much, Gary," Clarence said. "I have to get my raincoat on and get out and check the sky."

"It's raining, partner," Ron pointed out, "You can't see the sky through those clouds."

Human causes of landslides include:

- a. Excavation of slope or its toe
- b. Loading of slope or its crest
- c. Drawdown (of reservoirs)
- d. Deforestation
- e. Irrigation
- f. Mining
- g. Artificial vibration
- h. Water leakage from utilities

Slope saturation by water is a primary cause of landslides. This effect can occur in the form of intense rainfall, snowmelt, changes in ground-water levels, and water-level changes along coastlines, earth dams, and the banks of lakes, reservoirs, canals, and rivers. Soil saturation can also be caused by long steady slow rainfalls, which in turn cause a change in the ground-water levels. The water soaks in instead of running off. It usually takes some event to trigger a landslide, like maybe a small earthquake along the Sierra Madre Fault, for example. Just big enough to cause something called liquefaction.

Don't hold my limited knowledge of geology against me. 40 years ago, I satisfied a science requirement with a class in geology and the other requirement by a class in sociology. Don't really understand people, either. Made a few friends in college, though.

Some were members of the Bourbon family like old Jim Beam. Then there was Jack Daniels, Adolph Coors and some guy named Bud Weiser. Another old pal was a guy with a really strange name, Chivas Regal. Must have been from the United Kingdom. I have a whole string of initials after my name like BA, MBA and a PhD in sarcasm.

“The 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens, in Washington triggered a massive landslide on the north flank of the volcano, the largest landslide in recorded times.”

That statement is almost right, you know. A 5.1 earthquake, caused by a magma flow, triggered a landslide that allowed the magma to explode from the volcano. A 4.6 earthquake on the Sierra Madre Fault caused liquefaction in the rain soaked mountains above Rancho Cucamonga on Saturday, May 23, 2009, causing most of the mountain to slide off into the ravine. The quake and subsequent slide came right at the dinner hour when everyone was sitting down to a nice dinner. The guard towers went first, followed by the shelter. After that, the cabins slipped into the ravine before most of the people even knew the mountain was sliding. The fuel tanks followed and ruptured causing one hell of an explosion. But, nobody had to worry about the fire because the mud was still sliding and then those stand tanks fell over and ruptured, further washing soil into the ravine.

They erected a theme park in honor of Jack, Steve, Marty, Sergeant, Sandy, Moira and The Three Amigos. They named it, ‘Raging Waters’. A couple of days after the slide, a small meteorite hit the former site of Liberty Village, creating a crater about 1/3 of a mile across. That was number 10, but the folks had stopped counting 2 days earlier. Those Three Amigos are sort of like cats, you know. They have 9 lives and they haven’t used up all nine of them. Yet.

*Big John
Big John*

*Every morning at the mine you could see him arrive
He stood six-foot-six and weighed two-forty-five
Kinda broad at the shoulder and narrow at the hip
Everybody knew you didn’t give no lip to Big John*

*Big John
Big John
Big Bad John
Big John*

*Nobody seemed to know where John called home
He just drifted into town and stayed all alone
He didn’t say much, kinda quiet and shy
If ya spoke at all, ya just said hi to Big John*

*Somebody said he came from New Orleans
Where he got in a fight o'er a cajun queen
And a crashin' blow from a huge right hand
Sent a Lousianna fella to the promised land, Big John*

*Big John
Big John
Big Bad John
Big John*

*Then came the day at the bottom of the mine
When a timber cracked and men started cryin'
Miners were prayin' and hearts beat fast
And everybody thought they'd breathed their last, 'cept John*

*Through the dust and the smoke of this man-made hell
Walked a giant of a man that the miners knew well
Grabbed the saggin' timber and gave out with a groan
And like a giant oak tree, just stood there alone, Big John*

*Big John
Big John
Big Bad John
Big John*

*And with all of his strength he gave a mighty shove
Then a miner yelled out, there's a light up above
And twenty men scrambled from a would-be grave
now there's only one left down there to save, Big John*

*With jacks and timbers they started back down
Then came that rumble way down in the ground
As smoke and gas belched outta the mine
Everybody knew it was the end of the line for Big John*

*Big John
Big John
Big Bad John
Big John*

*Now, they never re-opened that worthless pit
They just placed a marble stand in front of it
These few words are written on that stand,*

At the bottom of this mine lies one Hell of a man, Big John

Big John
Big John
Big Bad John
Big John

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